

Defining religion to be recognized by a state

The case of neo-pagan community “Romuva” in Lithuania

Lukrecijus Tubys

Master thesis

Religion, conflict and dialogue programme

Faculty of Theology

Helsinki University

2020

Tiedekunta – Fakultet – Faculty Theology		Koulutusohjelma – Utbildningsprogram – Degree Programme Religion, conflict and dialogue	
Tekijä – Författare – Author Lukrecijus Tubys			
Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title Defining religion to be recognized by a state. The case of neo-pagan community “Romuva” in Lithuania			
Oppiaine/Opintosuunta – Läroämne/Studieinriktning – Subject/Study track			
Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level Masters	Aika – Datum – Month and year 11, 2020	Sivumäärä – Sidoantal – Number of pages 82	

<p>Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract</p> <p>Lithuanian neo-pagan community “Romuva” approached the Lithuanian parliament to grant it state’s recognition. According to the Ministry of Justice, the religious community met all necessary requirements – it has been registered for 25 years, its customs and creeds do not contradict law and morals, and it has support in the society. However, the Lithuanian parliament voted against granting the new status. This thesis aims on how was the legal recognition of the “Romuva” argued for and against in the public media and the Lithuanian parliament and what kind of understanding of neo-paganism in particular and religion in general was constructed in these arguments.</p> <p>To achieve the goal two sets of data were analyzed: all articles related with “Romuva” recognition appeared on the most popular as well as pro-christian and pro-romuvian media sites from 2018-2020. Also public records from the Lithuanian parliament during submission and consideration phases, letters to parliamentarians. The data was also structured in a timeline to track the development of arguments.</p> <p>Findings show that even though the question for recognition is legal, during the debate historical and political arguments were dominating. Many of them did not relate with requirements for the recognition officially set by the Ministry of Justice. The biggest involvement in the question was demonstrated by pro-christian community’s members – politicians, scholars. The recognition for neo-pagans was strongly resisted by the dominant religion in Lithuania Christian Church.</p>
<p>Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords</p> <p>Romuva, neo-paganism, recognition, Lithuania</p>
<p>Ohjaaja tai ohjaajat – Handledare – Supervisor or supervisors</p> <p>Teemu Taira, Tuula Sakaranaho</p>
<p>Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited</p>
<p>Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information</p>

Dedication

To my wife Inga which I met in Helsinki
and my mother Aušra – studies were possible only because of her

Table of contents

1. Introduction	8
1.1 Previous researches – examples from abroad	11
1.2 Research question – what was revealed with “Romuva’s” case?	18
1.3 Explication of what comes in the following chapters	19
2. Defining religion	20
2.1 Difficulties in defining	21
2.2 Religious identities	25
2.3 Invented religions	28
2.4 Defining religion and religious community in Lithuanian legal terms	30
2.5 Explication of used data	33
3. The case study – “Romuva’s” recognition	35
3.1 How laws enter into force in Lithuania	37
3.2 Ministry of Justice conclusion	39
3.3 Parliament’s Resolution	42
3.4 Public debate: doubts about the past and links with politics	44
3.4 The final rejection	58
3.5 Romuvians sought to defend their rights	62
4. Summary and conclusion	69
5. Bibliography	75
Sources:	75
Literature:	80

1. Introduction

Lithuanian society has experienced one of the biggest religious discussions in a decade during the past several years. In 2017 the Parliament received neo-pagan community's "Romuva" application to be granted state's recognition. Since then up to the summer of 2020 an interesting debate took place. By far the most intensive phase of the discussion happened during the summer of 2019 as in the end of June the Parliament had to decide whether to grant the state's recognition to neo-pagan community "Romuva". Journalists, politicians, sociologists, romuvians, christians had their say, positions were seen, heard and read in social media, online media, TV and radio.

On the 27th of June, 2019, members of the Parliament gathered in Lithuania parliament, the Seimas, to discuss various economic, social, political questions. "Romuva's" recognition was one of them. Before the final vote the Parliament two times agreed on the resolution, however, not on the 27th of June. Then parliamentarians decided not to recognize "Romuva", the difference lied in 10 votes.

As later were known, that happened not without an impact from christian leaders. Just before the vote archbishop Gintaras Grušas sent a letter to members of the Parliament expressing his position why they should vote against the grant.¹ Moreover, the next day a note to the Ministry of Justice was sent to question ministry's elucidation on "Romuva's" eligibility for recognition.² What was said during the discussion in the Parliament has raised a lot of questions. Some politicians stated that there is no clear, facts-based connection between old times pagans and romuvians of nowadays, others said members of "Romuva" were known as KGB collaborators in Soviet Union,

¹ Lukrecijus Tubys, "Bažnyčia dėl "Romuvos" rašė ir Seimui, ir ministerijai: siekė neigyti "konkurentų", 15min, September 6, 2019.

² Ibid.

therefore recognition can be seen as a threat to the country's sovereignty. Pro-Romuva politicians were trying to persuade others by stating that Lithuania is a secular country, that freedom of religion is a constitutional right. Some also referred to the Ministry of Justice (which coordinates religious questions in Lithuania) statement that “Romuva” is suitable for recognition according to Lithuania laws and also to the National Security and Defence Committee’s position that “Romuva” doesn’t threaten the country in any form.

Recognition denial just sparked public debate further. Questions whether religious rights were violated, how strong and powerful the Church in Lithuania is, how to define “Romuva” emerged in various media channels. In December during the National Human Rights forum a religious conference was held to question if the decision was just according to a law. Lately the intensity of the debate has decreased, however, the topic is still very much valid. Romuvians have approached European Human Rights Court.

As religious debates in Lithuania are rare, this topic immediately grabbed my attention. I started following it from the consideration phase in the Parliament. Seeing the intensity and variety of argumentations, how widely it spreaded in the news, I am happy with an opportunity to elaborate on “Romuva’s” state’s recognition question in this master thesis.

I chose this topic for several reasons. The first one, during my studies at Helsinki university I gained knowledge about power that lies within every religious organization, especially the established ones. Coming back home to Lithuania and seeing Catholic Church in action I can imagine that the biggest community exploits their social powers for their welfare. By writing this thesis I believe I will better understand these processes.

Secondly, as a journalist I have a keen interest in working with recent events. Starting my thesis just a few months after discussions took place in the Parliament, I feel

that the topic is still fresh and it will be so for at least several years. Having deeper knowledge would help me to report on this issue in the future at my current workplace news portal 15min.lt. Thirdly, neo-pagan communities have been evolving all around the world, their presence has been felt stronger and stronger for the past several decades. This tendency automatically raises difficult social and cultural questions with other religions – how established religions perceive neo-pagans, how society accepts this community, how laws are formulated to fit religious landscape. While this particular debate took place in Lithuania, similar situations have been noticed in various countries. By working on this thesis I hope to gain a better knowledge of the changing context worldwide.

In the next sub-chapter several cases from abroad will be presented. Having them in this thesis will allow us to see a wider perspective on religious groups' recognition in various countries and how these cases resemble the situation that happened for “Romuva”.

1.1 Previous researches – examples from abroad

Due to the fact that “Romuva’s” recognition happened just recently, up to this day, no research has focused on the “Romuva’s” struggle and failure to gain state recognition in Lithuania. However, several relevant examples can be found and elaborated on quite extensively from abroad.

One of them is written by Suzanne Owen from University of Leeds which talks about the Paganism problem in Charity registration in England and Wales. In these countries, charity registration is one of the means by which a group can claim religious status. However, this has been difficult to pass for pagans. According to the author, groups must prove their “religious activities and public “good” which implies they have to adopt it according to the dominant values, in this case Protestant Christians.³

When Pagan Federation in 1996 applied for charity, they received several negative responds with arguments that “since many pagans affirm a belief in the Mother Goddess, to conclude that they did not therefore worship God was sexist” and “Paganism does not have a sufficiently certain meaning in ordinary English speech for its promotion to be charitable. <...> Paganism’ could simply mean ‘non-Christian’”⁴. S.Owen presents extract of Charity Commission that coordinates charity organisations reply:

³ Suzanne Owen, “The problem with paganism in Charity Registration in England and Wales”, *Implicit Religion*, 2018, Vol. 21 Issue 3, p. 271.

⁴ Suzanne Owen, “The problem with paganism in Charity Registration in England and Wales”, *Implicit Religion*, 2018, Vol. 21 Issue 3, p. 278.

Paganism is not so much a religion [...] but is rather “a spiritual way of life” embracing a great variety of hues within a broad spectrum. It does not appear to be a single structured religion but an indistinct form of loosely related nature spiritualities deriving from a number of different traditions and giving rise to an enormous variety of organisations of extreme diversity. (Charity Commission 1999, 2)⁵

Owen argues that from this point of view it is clear that Charity Commission (CC) had biases of what religion, spirituality is with a popular conception that a religion ought to be homogeneous in mind.

Later, in 2012, Pagan Federation (PF) tried to apply for charity approval again but then their core values were questioned, like what are PF activities for public benefit and does PF have theological coherency? The author emphasises that CC may have implied double standards. “Despite managing to show a general Pagan consensus regarding beliefs, the idea that individuals might also identify as Wiccan, Druid, Heathen or other is considered a problem in the eyes of the Charity Commission. Some diversity is acceptable, they say, and give the examples of Hinduism, Buddhism and even Christianity, but for one organisation to have diversity as a basis is grounds for rejection.”⁶

Owen in a collaboration with Teemu Taira analyzed one more case of Charity Commissions for England and Wales worth our attention. It nicely opens up a question about how the public classifies what religion is. In 2010 The Druid Network (TDN) was registered as a charity in this registry under the heading “for the advancements of religion”. However, a debate occurred whether TDN’s activities could be regarded as “religious”.

⁵ Suzanne Owen, “The problem with paganism in Charity Registration in England and Wales”, *Implicit Religion*, 2018, Vol. 21 Issue 3, p. 279.

⁶ Suzanne Owen, “The problem with paganism in Charity Registration in England and Wales”, *Implicit Religion*, 2018, Vol. 21 Issue 3, p. 281.

There were several reasons TDN grounded their registration upon. One of them was that they are a community uniting Druids from different groups and had an income. The other one, understanding that Druidry is a religion and thus being in a religious registry may “provide a better position for Druids when it came to instances of prejudice and persecution”.⁷ Nonetheless, the initiative was not welcomed in unison even within the community. In Druid Network conference in 2010 some critique was expressed as TDN cannot define Druidry “for all”, even though some consultancy took place of how Druidry could be defined.⁸

The Chosen Chief of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD) Philips Carr-Gomm has stated that once you want to define Druidry – issues may arise.

I – and many other OBOD members – have always liked the way Druidry has avoided being “boxed-in” to one definition: a spiritual path to some people, a magical tradition to another, a religion to a third, a philosophy or cultural phenomenon to another, and so on. As soon as you start on the path of trying to define Druidry you run onto problems... some Druids don’t consider themselves Pagan so you’ve got a problem right away. Not all Druids would agree with all aspects of the definition of Druidry that The Druid Network have agreed with the Charity Commission⁹

Alternatively, other Druids were more supportive. Some of them were saying that being a christian and a Druid is not a contradiction, some claiming that Druidry is definitely a religion and Charity Commission by registering TDN was “2000 years late”.¹⁰

Debates took place not only within Druids community but due to press involvement polemics appeared in public too. Britain newspaper The Daily Mail,

⁷ Suzanne Owen; Teemu Taira, “The Category of “Religion” in Public Classification: Charity Registration of The Druid Network in England and Wales”, *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty*, 2015, p. 105.

⁸ Suzanne Owen; Teemu Taira, “The Category of “Religion” in Public Classification: Charity Registration of The Druid Network in England and Wales”, *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty*, 2015, p. 106.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, 107.

recognized as a pro-Christian tabloid paper, has published several articles covering TDN and CC's story. One article was written by a journalist Melanie Phillips that expressed her views of Druidry being a religion in a column.

Will someone please tell me this is all a joke, <...> Elevating them to the same status as Christianity is but the latest example of how the bedrock creed of this country is being undermined. More than that, it is an attack upon the very concept of religion itself. This is because Druidry is simply not a religion. Now, it's true that religion is notoriously difficult to define. But true religions surely rest on an established structure of traditions, beliefs, literature and laws. Above all, they share a belief in a supernatural deity (or more than one) that governs the universe.¹¹

Owen and Taira argue that Phillips' issue was the understanding of deity – to her deity is transcendent. “But the key point is surely that none of these beliefs involves a ‘supreme’ being that exists beyond the Earth and the universe. On the contrary, Druids worship what is in or on the earth itself. <...> By these standards, Druidry is surely not a religion but a cult” – she concludes. According to Owen and Taira, standards she referred to are rather her personal norms that are largely agreed with CC position stated in TDN decision though.

Philips' report was sensitively perceived by Druids, more than 4000 signatures were collected for a petition demanding an apology. However, The Daily Mail has published even more stories having headlines such as “Druidry recognized as religion in Britain for the first time” or “Druids: Worshippers of nature who were said to sacrifice humans”. Both articles with some misleading information were written by Religious Affairs Correspondent Martin Beckford. Coming back to Philips text, Owen and Taira emphasizes, it has shown two important factors. The first one that tension between public recognition and public representation emerged and the second one –

¹¹ Melanie Phillips, “MELANIE PHILLIPS: Druids as an official religion? Stones of Praise here we come”, The Daily Mail, October 4, 2010.

preconditioned conceptional pairs. Philips called Druidry a cult rather than religion without broadly explaining differences. Authors claim that there is no need to do that as The Daily Mail readers already see “cult” as a negative term. “This conceptual pair between religion and cult is used in arguing for the maintenance of specifically Christian heritage and its elevation. To put it simply, (Christian) religion is civilized; cults is barbarian.”¹²

Authors argue that even though TDN received CC recognition, another issue arose – Druidry became somewhat defined. That means if other Druidry branches would apply for registration, they were to follow the existing definition of Druidry presented by TDN. “<...> Some Druids see this process – in which the “religiosity” of Druidry (as opposed to “secularity”) was negotiated for the purposes of charity law – as diminishing the experiential and experimental nature of Druidry and domesticating it by classifying Druidry as a “religion”.¹³

Another interesting story is covered by Essi Eleonoora Makela from University of Helsinki. She analyses on what basis minority communities are registered in Finland. The author takes three cases of La Societed del Amor de Dios (SAD), Suomen Aarimmaisen Vapaa Eristinen Liike (Finnish Extremely Free Erisian Movement or FEFEM) which were not registered and Karhun kansa which was.

The registration of religious communities in Finland, writes E. E. Makela, is conducted according to the Freedom of Religion Act (FORA) back in 1992. In order to be registered, since 2003, communities must be in line with FORA’s Section 7 which states that a religious community’s purpose is to organize and support the individual, communal, and public practice that belongs to the confession and practice of religion.

¹² Suzanne Owen; Teemu Taira, “The Category of “Religion” in Public Classification: Charity Registration of The Druid Network in England and Wales”, *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty*, 2015, p. 108.

¹³ Suzanne Owen; Teemu Taira, “The Category of “Religion” in Public Classification: Charity Registration of The Druid Network in England and Wales”, *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty*, 2015, p. 111.

Also has to “honor personal freedoms and human rights, not be established for the purpose of financial gain, or organize for specifically economic purposes”. Besides organized practices must go along with the law on associations, these can be established under a license.

Author starts its analysis with the religious SAD community which does not belong to any particular christian denominational tradition, however, has links to it. It refers to the Bible, and values like the “Love of God”. SAD applied for registration in 2014, December 8. Patent and Registry Office (PRO) was against it on 1st of September, 2015. The author explains ambiguity of reasons.

In the case of SAD, the board lacked sufficient information on the practice of the Finnish community, but also background information for the international community mentioned in the application. The board did not request references as such, it only stated that it could not find any. The community changed their description somewhat between the issued statements, but failed to pinpoint their tradition enough to be registered – or to give any references. “The board does not state how it finds information and it does not request further information, nor does it give any suggestions as to what is required in the application. A question arises as about whether a movement that has not yet been studied by ‘impartial actors’ could be registered, and the extent to which a community should describe its practices so that the link with certain established traditions is more evident.”¹⁴

As far as FEFEM is concerned, their application was also denied by PRO. Community, which stands for Discordianism ideas stating that the world is a chaos and there is no one Truth and which worships the God of Chaos, applied for registration in 2014. PRO denied registration “because the board decided that the sacred writings of the community were too parodic and satirical to be the basis of registered religion”¹⁵.

¹⁴ Essi Eleonoora Mäkelä, “‘Impartial Sources’ and the Registration of Religious Communities in Finland”, *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, 2018, 31 (1), p. 12.

¹⁵ Essi Eleonoora Mäkelä, “‘Impartial Sources’ and the Registration of Religious Communities in Finland”, *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, 2018, 31 (1), p. 17.

The author emphasises that PRO also was not trying to understand the establishment of the creed or practices, but was looking into the spiritual “*grounds of activity*”¹⁶.

The third case taken by the author is Karhun kansa’s (People of the Bear). The community was registered in 2013. Community claimed they have a creed and practice which is a legacy from their ancestors from pre-Christian times, like Midsummer bonfire, “Ancient Poems of the Finnish People” collection is considered as sacred.

The board of the PRO had rejected several applications, but finally legitimised it by putting “People of the Bear” into the category of “Neo-paganism”. As the author writes, “the board stated that it is hard to define movements outside the world religions, but they understood the People of the Bear’s practices to be connected with the religious world-view of Neopaganism—namely nature religiosity.”¹⁷ Interestingly enough, the community did not find themselves to be pagans.

These several different examples show rather similar problems. The underlying one is that there is no united understanding of what can be called religion. The answer to this question is usually influenced by viewers perspective and their pre-conditions – whether they are part of a discussed religious group or people with a decision making agency.

¹⁶ Italic is in the source text.

¹⁷ Essi Eleonoora Mäkelä, “‘Impartial Sources’ and the Registration of Religious Communities in Finland”, *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, 2018, 31 (1), p. 20.

1.2 Research question – what was revealed with “Romuva’s” case?

Since, as was mentioned, no research has been done on this issue here in Lithuania up to this day, previously written cases from abroad set a good example of how neo-pagan community’s “Romuva’s” approach for recognition could be analyzed. Questions I am going to raise in this thesis are: how was the legal recognition of the “Romuva” argued for and against in the public media and Lithuanian Parliament? What kind of understanding of neo-paganism in particular and religion in general was constructed in these arguments?

The aim of this study is to increase our understanding on the definition of religion, how neo-pagan movement was perceived and understood in Lithuania by members of the Parliament as well as other members of society that participated in the debate. The focus of this thesis goes on arguments that were used for and against “Romuva”.

This master thesis analysis will be based on public sources. I will distinguish them by date based on the debate phases: before discussion in the Parliament, during the discussion and after. For the first and the third phase, publications appeared on Lithuanian media outlets will be taken for the analysis. I collected articles from national broadcaster LRT.lt, the biggest news portal Delfi.lt, second biggest news outlet 15min.lt, pro-christian Bernardinai.lt, pro-romuvian Alkas.lt. For the second part, I will look into transcripts of the public discussion held in Seimas during the final consideration phase where only politicians that were able to vote for or against “Romuva’s” recognition participated. This source of information will be taken from the Parliament’s website LRS.lt.

1.3 Explication of what comes in the following chapters

The discussion of the thesis will begin with an attempt to inform a reader why it is difficult to define religion, as how society and politicians understood neo-paganism and religion in Lithuania is one of my key points of the thesis. I will present various scholars ideas and views on that as well as what issues may arise from defining it. Moreover, we will speak about cultural and religious identities, how it changed during centuries and why it is important to speak about the notion of invented religions in the “Romuva” case. In addition to this, the religious landscape in Lithuania, how law defines religion, what requirements and procedures are needed for a community to be recognized in this country will be covered. Before the analysis part I will explain what data will be used and why it is significant for this topic.

The case study will begin with an introduction of what procedures “Romuva” took in order to have its recognition considered as well as what conclusion responsible institutions drew from its approach. Then texts appeared in public media and politicians’ statements will be analyzed while distinguished in three parts – before, during and after the final consideration held in Lithuanian parliament. There a reader will be presented with arguments from public discussion in the most important news sites and the Lithuanian parliament.

2. Defining religion

For until some fairly precise criteria of inclusion of phenomena in the denotation of 'religion' have been given, it is impossible to specify those variables whose behaviour we have to try to explain.¹⁸

As seen from above, understanding and defining religion is a challenge that is difficult to handle in various parts of the world. Before going into Lithuanian case of neo-pagan community “Romuva” and how its application for recognition was dismissed, we will have a discussion about religious perspectives and Lithuanian legal context in which the granting decision was made.

In the first part a set of scholar perspectives towards how religions are defined, what can be called a religion, what tensions are to be kept in mind when discussing this issue will be presented. This section will not favor any scholar perspective, rather it is for better understanding why there's so much difficulty in debating religious matters even among academics and that these negotiations concern used definitions in a Lithuanian context.

When it is difficult to reach a consensus from a religious debate, then political and legal factors step in for their pragmatic nature. In the second part I will introduce a reader to Lithuanian legal context. This background information will broaden our understanding before going deeper into the case of “Romuva's” recognition and discussion happened around it.

¹⁸ Robin Horton, “A Definition of Religion, and its Uses”, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (Jul. - Dec., 1960), p. 201.

2.1 Difficulties in defining

It's very difficult to define religion. Scholars from various academic fields – sociology, anthropology, religious studies and etc. – face this issue.¹⁹ This part of the thesis doesn't aim to clear these confusions but to understand better where difficulty lies.

So what is religion? Oxford English dictionary says that religion as a first meaning is “a state of life bound by religious vows; the condition of belonging to a religious order”²⁰ Such a short explanation could not satisfy. Rather provokes to ask more questions, like what are religious vows or religious order. Since we will be discussing Lithuanian case, I inquired about the same in the Lithuanian Dictionary of International words. The given answer was: religion is “a belief that supernatural powers exist (whether it is God or gods and spirits); it is confession, rites and organizations.”²¹ This answer partly seconds Oxford English dictionary definition as religion ought to be organized, however, it also makes another underline that religion is based on a belief of something preternatural, even unearthly.

Anthropologists would see religion in rather different light. In his article “A Definition of Religion, and its Uses” Robin Horton presents three British anthropology approaches to religion. The first one considers the term “religion” as having difficulty to be deconstructed in more details and as embracing human behaviour without clearly stated boundaries. The second idea of how “religion” could be seen – “as a class of metaphorical statements and actions obliquely denoting social relationships and claims

¹⁹ Benson Saler, ‘Religio and the Definition of Religion’, *Cultural Anthropology* 2/3 (August 1987), p. 395.

²⁰ “Religion, n.”, Oxford English Dictionary.

²¹ “Religija reikšmė”, Tarptautinių žodžių žodynas.

to social status”²². The third considers “religion” to be intertwined with specific objects, like religion is the belief in spirits or supernatural powers. However, to Horton these three perspectives are not satisfactory, as they are outdated and complicated to be used in other disciplines, like history or psychology. Therefore he suggests his own definition describing religion as “an extension of the field of people’s social relationships beyond the confines of purely human society <...> This extension must be one in which human beings involved see themselves in a dependent positions vis-a-vis their non-human alters – a qualification necessary to exclude pets from the pantheon of gods²³”. Anthropologist Benson Saler uses the term of “religion” in quite similar manner stating that “religion <...> (is) a variable congeries of social phenomena within and sometimes between human societies²⁴”.

<...> It variably expresses and otherwise relates to a complexity of values that define important psychological and cultural dimensions in human life. Lest we forget, moreover, it is worth affirming that the intensity of commitment to religious ideas may vary from person to person, in small-scale societies as well as in our own, just as punctiliousness in the exercise of rites may vary not only from individual to individual but perhaps over individual lifetimes as well. In short, there is not only a fair amount of heterogeneity in what we identify as religions, but also among religion-bearers.²⁵

Defining religion is an issue for religious studies (secular or confessional), religious communities and society as well. Carole M. Cusack writes that there are several different approaches in defining religion. Essentialist – one of them – it claims that religion is unique, not reducible to anything else, *sui generis*. It was changed quite drastically by non-confessional religious scholars that defined religion as “the unreachable goal towards which the study is directed, that is to understand what

²² Robin Horton, “A Definition of Religion, and its Uses”, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (Jul. - Dec., 1960), p. 201

²³ Ibid, 211.

²⁴ Benson Saler, “Understanding Religion”, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2009. p. 3.

²⁵ Ibid.

religion is, [being] required as a precondition of the study.”²⁶ Cusack states that this functionalist definition can be seen as more useful than essentialist when it comes to practical religion as it talks about what religion does than is. Third category of definitions is called polythetic which derives from Ludwig Wittgenstein philosophy. He issued down the problematics of defining religion into a practical level, outlining nine attributes to what can be called a religion:

1. It's a belief in supernatural beings,
2. notions of sacredness and profanity,
3. ritual and prayer to communicate with the sacred realm,
4. authoritative texts,
5. buildings or spaces set aside for religious activities,
6. a code of morals,
7. the experience of awe towards the divine,
8. a world-view that explains that particular community's place in the 'overall purpose or point of the world', and
9. the organization of human life according to this worldview.²⁷

Cusack states that polythetic perspective includes cultural category into the debate which, to the author, is a realistic approach having in mind that religion arguably can be seen as a subcategory of culture. Scholar emphasizes that this definition suggests close interactions between religion and social contexts: “if the cultural context is ascetic and anti-materialist, the dominant religious form of that community will be, too; if the cultural context is consumerist, then the dominant religious form of that community will be, too.”²⁸

²⁶ Carole Cusack, “Invented religions imagination, fiction and faith. *Invented Religions Imagination, Fiction and Faith*”. Ashgate Publishing Company. 2010. p. 20.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

As stated above, defining religion is in an interest of various disciplines. However, not all of them have similar needs and the level of definition's practicality may differ. Therefore while others have reasons to look for a "golden" definition, others may not. For example, as Peter W. Edge states that lawmakers may have several reasons to have a term of "religion" broad. As per him, "in the legislative process, which it will be recalled may explicitly accommodate political debate, silence on definition of religious and spiritual matters may lead to what appears to be a consensus".²⁹ Edge also quotes three main reasons why religion should not be defined as presented by Cumper. The first one is that by avoiding definition we also obviate extremely difficult tasks: the necessity to make a definition which is suitable and acceptable to all religions of the world and at the same time is practical enough. The second reason – there is a risk of exclusivity if religious definition is more suitable to majority than minority. And the last reason lies within limiting existing religious and philosophical background – "the variety of conscientious, religious, and spiritual beliefs would present problems to a definition based on traditional, Western, views of religion"³⁰ Thus, to Edge, describing religion in law is a hard challenge because of the pluralistic nature of legal orders.

It is undeniable that the task of defining religion for legal purposes is extremely difficult. Numerous court systems have found creating such a definition problematic, even for overarching religious liberty guarantees. Neither the organs of the European Convention on Human Rights, nor the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights have developed a detailed definition.³¹

As Winnifred Fallers Sullivan had described tensions between religion and law – both speak "in languages largely opaque to each other".³²

²⁹ Peter W. Edge, "Religion and Law. An Introduction", Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006, p. 28.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, 29.

³² Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, "The impossibility of religious freedoms", Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 3.

2.2 Religious identities

As seen from examples above, religion is difficult to describe not only for academic outlanders, but for practitioners too. Roots of this issue may be found in different historical and cultural experiences. There are 18 major religious categories in the world today (atheists, agnostics, bahais, buddhists, chinese folk-religionists, christians, confucianists, daoists, ethnoreligionists, hindus, jains, jews, muslims, new religionists, shintoists, sikhs, spiritists, zoroastrians³³), however, the exact number of religions practised in the world is difficult to tell.

If in the XXI century in the West there is a freedom to follow any belief, hundreds of years ago religions were not an object to choose in the western world, rather it was inherited. That predetermined mostly two reasons – in the late XVIII century there were almost no other religions than Christianity which was highly dominant in Europe and European-derived societies. Second reason stands for christians approach to the other – colonized cultures and their religions were not recognized.³⁴ Carole M. Cusack argues that a major shift happened with Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott who founded Theosophical Society in New York in 1875. “It was possible for modern individuals to turn away from Judeo-Christian tradition and seek religious and spiritual satisfaction in Eastern religions”.³⁵ Author claims that with the modern era came the concept of secularization. As Peter Berger puts it: secularization is the “process whereby sectors of society and culture are removed from the dominant religious institutions and symbols”.³⁶ With modernity – the rise of the nation state, developed international markets, increased literacy and printing and etc. –

³³ “World Religion Database”, Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, eds, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020.

³⁴ Carole Cusack, “Invented religions imagination, fiction and faith. Invented Religions Imagination, Fiction and Faith”, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010, p. 7.

³⁵ Ibid, 8.

³⁶ Peter L. Berger, “The Social Reality of Religion”, Penguin Books, London, 1967, p. 107.

came not only separation from dominant culture but also, as Sullivan writes, it has parted national and religious identities. “For perhaps the first time since Constantine, religious affiliation in Europe began to be detached again from political identity. National and religious identity no longer necessarily went hand in hand”.³⁷ Sullivan argues, ironically, religion served this purpose – during centuries it was intentionally or unintentionally reshaped and embedded with new perspectives of secular political order as well as nationality. Therefore he claims that long before “fundamentalism” in the 1970s religion had been divided into modern and anti-modern. Thus strongly diverse within.

On the other hand, religious extremism played its part in shaping identities too. Cusack argues that new religious movements, which at first were called “cults”, were seen as deviant, eccentric, challenging norms in comparison to normative religion – Christianity. And even though some of them failed to exist for a longer time, other communities emerged. In the long term it has created totally new expectations of religion.

Yves Lambert has argued that the interactions of modernity and religion created four possible future scenarios: ‘decline, adaptation or reinterpretation, conservation, and innovation’, and he noted that those relevant to the growth of new religions, reinterpretation and innovation, tended to exhibit certain characteristics. These are this-worldliness, self-spirituality, immanent divinity, dehierarchization, parascientific or science fiction-based beliefs, loose organizational structure, and ‘pluralism, relativism, probabilism, and pragmatism’.¹⁰ Logically, this meant that those who participated in new and alternative religions would do so in a rather different spirit than those who were in mainstream Christian denominations, or even reinterpretations of Christianity such as Pentecostalism. The criterion of truth is eclipsed in such religions; members are more likely to ask ‘does it work?’ than ‘is it true?’ Moreover, their definition of what works is flexible and pragmatic. As they are ‘seekers’, they will move on to another practice or teaching should their current group cease to ‘work’ for them.³⁸

³⁷ Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, “The impossibility of religious freedoms”, Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 7.

³⁸ Carole Cusack, “Invented religions imagination, fiction and faith. Invented Religions Imagination, Fiction and Faith”, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010, p. 10.

As Cusack writes, scholars around the world generally agree that believing in the early XXI century is much more different than to that of one or even two centuries ago. One of the biggest changes lies within a religious practitioner – author explains that his identity is now much more based on a self as an individual rather than self as a part of religious community.

The shift to secularity consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.³⁹

These different approaches to religion throughout history show the variety of backgrounds and experiences that can be used in a debate for religious identity and for a question of what is religion. Lori G. Beaman acknowledges this complexity thus warns that simplifying it can cause unwanted harms to religious communities. Scholar emphasises three problems that may occur. Firstly, religion and religious identities are interchanging and contextual, thus static definition is not adequate. Secondly, religion is one of many identities a person has within him/her which is shaped in complex ways, rather than a crucial stand-point. Thirdly, she argues that by overemphasizing religious identity practices may be pushed towards orthodox perspectives.⁴⁰

³⁹ Charles Taylor, *"A Secular Age"*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2007, p. 3

⁴⁰ Lori G. Beaman, *"Deep equality in an era of religious diversity"*, Oxford University press, 2017, p. 4

2.3 Invented religions

The emergence of new religions seems to be one sign of a healthy and free society, and we can now see everywhere that the slowing of the process of the formation of new religions occurs only where the suppressive powers of the state are called to bear.⁴¹

As we will be dealing with neo-pagan community's "Romuva" issues it would be proper to talk in more details about the concept of invented religions. As we will see in the case analysis, some new religious movements cannot be seen as religion due to the lack of historical continuity. That was the issue for "Romuva's" recognition by the state as well. (See more in the chapter X). Is long history important in deciding whether a community can call itself religious? Cusack argues that not necessarily.

The author states that "invented religions are neither trivial nor necessarily invalid. Rather, when their historical and social context is investigated and their teachings are examined, they can be seen to be functionally similar, if not identical, to traditional religions."⁴² She even states that some newly invented religions are more successful than others which emphasizes that rich history doesn't guarantee a future for religious communities.

As an example of invented religions Cusack presents Discordianism which was founded in 1957. Even though at first this religion was treated as a parody by critics, later Discordians asserted themselves within modern Paganism and have developed theological principles, Principia Discordia. Church of all Worlds, Jediism and

⁴¹ J. Gordon Melton, "Perspective New New Religions: Revisiting a Concept", *Nova Religio* 10/4 (2007), p. 109.

⁴² Carole Cusack, "Invented religions imagination, fiction and faith. Invented Religions Imagination, Fiction and Faith", Ashgate Publishing Company. 2010. p. 3

Matrixism, the author claims, are also newly invented religions, but, for example, well known Scientology, which was found in the middle of XX century, doesn't seem to be the one. Cusack writes that even though it comes from the same millennium and it looks like it begins as an invented religion it likely has other roots. Scholar states that Scientology began as a critique of psychiatry, as a therapy⁴³ and only later evolved into a religious movement.

A consistent theme that runs through the history of invented religions is that it is possible (even likely?) to invent (or join) a movement knowing that it is not 'true' and to later discover, through experience, that it is true, for you. This phenomenon dispenses with the argument that the intentions of the founder matter, that a leader who preaches a falsehood can invalidate the faith of later converts. Religion is, to a large extent, about narrative and the success of the story. In the case of the Church of all Worlds, its founders thought Robert A. Heinlein's "Stranger in a Strange Land" was a fiction so good it should actually be true. This, clearly, is the thinking that also underlies the founding of both Jediism and Matrixism.⁴⁴

The founder and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions Massimo Introvigne would likely agree with Cusack's ideas. He claims that the successes of the religious movement doesn't depend on historical grounds. M. Introvigne claims that in the East – China, South Korea – the number of practitioners of newly found religions can reach millions of people. Scholars also gives some more familiar examples from the Western, like mormons, founded in XIX century, which are recognized by Italy. As scholars says "invented tradition is still a tradition if it is practised by a lot of people⁴⁵".

⁴³ Carole Cusack; David G. Robertson, with Christopher R. Cotter. "Invented Religions." The Religious Studies Project (Podcast Transcript).

⁴⁴ Carole Cusack, "Invented religions imagination, fiction and faith. Invented Religions Imagination, Fiction and Faith", Ashgate Publishing Company. 2010. p. 4

⁴⁵ Lukrecijus Tubys, "Religijų mokslininkas M.Introvigne apie iššūkius Kalėdoms, krikščionybėi bei Lietuvos bažnyčiai", 15min, December 24, 2019.

2.4 Defining religion and religious community in Lithuanian legal terms

As core of this thesis is a Lithuanian case study of “Romuva’s” neo-pagan community recognition by the state, let’s discuss how law describes religion and what is needed for a community to be granted a recognition. A right to practice chosen religion and freedom of religion in Lithuania is noted in the Constitution. The main law also states that Lithuania is a secular country.⁴⁶ Religious communities’ and state’s relationship is described in the Republic of Lithuania Civil Code as well as in the Law of Religious communities. Religious questions in Lithuania are processed by the Ministry of Justice. Interestingly enough neither one of the mentioned laws don’t suggest any definition of the term “religion”.

As a matter of simplicity, let’s say there are three major levels of recognition of religious communities by the state. First is to be officially registered, second – to have an official recognition and, third, to be recognized as a traditional religious community. On the lowest step we find religious organizations that are officially registered. A religious group must meet certain requirements to achieve that. According to the law, at least 15 members after providing the name of the organization, address, teachings, activities and its goals, management structure, the procedure for disposing of property can hope for a successful registration. In total there are 1312 registered religious organizations in Lithuania⁴⁷. “Romuva” is on this stage.

In the middle of this so-called hierarchy are religious communities recognized by the state. Here we can find only four groups: Evangelical Baptists church, Seventh-day

⁴⁶ “Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania”, Lithuanian Parliament, Accessed September 5
<https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.21892>

⁴⁷ “Įregistruotų religinių organizacijų skaičius 2007-2019 m.”, The Ministry of Justice of Lithuania, 2019

Adventist church, The Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith, Lithuanian New Apostles church. How do religious communities receive state's recognition? According to the Law of Religious communities, "other (non-traditional) religious communities can be granted as a part of Lithuania's historical, spiritual and societal heritage if they have support in the society and its creeds are not against law and moral. States recognition means that state supports religious communities spiritual, cultural and societal heritage"⁴⁸. The law states that a recognition is given by the Parliament and that religious communities can apply for a recognition only 25 years after their first registration in Lithuania. If a resolution for recognition is denied, another attempt can be initiated no sooner than after 10 years. Recognized religious communities are allowed to teach in schools, state recognizes its marriages, states covers preachers social insurance and the national broadcaster LRT must dedicate ceremonials broadcasting time.

On the top of this hierarchy sit nine religious groups as, according to the Law of Religious communities, they are part of "Lithuanian historical, spiritual and societal heritage"⁴⁹: 1. Latin Catholic, Greek Catholic church, Evangelical Lutherans church, Evangelical Reformed church, Orthodox church, Old Believers church, Jews, Sunni Islam and Karaites. "All of these have at least 300 years of tradition, dating back to the times of the Lithuanian Grand Duchy. According to the interpretations of the Constitutional court, this category is complete. Unless after a very long time a new religious community could be proud of centuries of history"⁵⁰, – to a local newspaper *alfa*. It said Donatas Glodenis, the Ministry of Justice chief specialist managing religious

⁴⁸ "Lietuvos Respublikos religinių bendruomenių ir bendrijų įstatymas", The Ministry of Justices of Lithuania, 2019.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Daiva Savickienė, "Kodėl religinės bendrijos siekia būti pripažintomis valstybės?", *Panevėžio balsas*, September 23, 2018.

questions. There are 41 religious confessions registered in Lithuania, therefore 32 considered as non-traditional.

2.5 Explication of used data

Since my research questions are: how was the legal recognition of the “Romuva” argued for and against in the public media and Lithuanian Parliament and what kind of understanding of neo-paganism in particular and religion in general was constructed in these arguments, I have selected my data accordingly. To answer these I will analyse the content of publication appeared online during the period of the discussion related with “Romuva’s” recognition – from 2018 till 2020. In order to have a better scope of the debate I have chosen to look into articles from several sources. Analysed content had appeared in national broadcaster website LRT.lt, the biggest news portal Delfi.lt, second by large news outlet 15min.lt. I included news sites that are likely to be biased on the case – pro-christiant news website Bernardinai.lt and pro-romuvian Alkas.lt.

I have gathered all publications that were somehow related to “Romuva’s” recognition topic during the mentioned years. A reader will be informed that some texts were written by journalists, some texts by columnists, scholars position also will be presented (all regarded as outsiders of the topic). Some publications were written down by inside parties – closely to christian church-related or pro-Romuva actors that persuaded for or against romuvian’s recognition. Their ideas were presented as commentary or as an interview.

To fulfill my research goal I will have politicians’ statements during the final consideration and open letters to them by involved parties (Church and “Romuva”) as my data as well. This data is significant because the procedure of the recognition is taken in the Parliament and decided by member’s votes only. It is important to note that below a reader will find the Ministry of Justice conclusion on “Romuva” and a group of parliamentarians project on “Romuva’s” recognition. These two important documents

are presented but not analyzed. Both of them are given as factual information and the whole focus is concentrated on argumentation in articles and public records of the Parliament.

3. The case study – “Romuva’s” recognition

“Romuva’s” recognition case has been one of the most prominent religious questions for past several years. Although 84 percent of Lithuanians considered themselves as being part of any religious group, according to the latest research in 2011⁵¹, religious topics rarely appear for the public debate. But “Romuva’s” wish to get state’s recognition ignited long time unseen conversations that involved various different public actors – Catholic church, “Romuva’s” representatives, pro-Christian academics, professors of religion, sociologists, politicians and columnists. In this part of the thesis I will try to dig deeper into their argumentation for and against neo-pagan community’s pursuits as well as try to understand how was the legal recognition of the “Romuva” argued in the public media and Lithuanian Parliament. In addition to this, I also try to research what kind of understanding of neo-paganism in particular and religion in general was constructed in these arguments.

In the beginning of the analysis part I will shortly explain the procedure of how laws and resolutions enter into force in the country. Then I will follow the timeline of events – firstly present the Ministry of Justice conclusion about “Romuva’s” eligibility for state’s recognition and then the official Parliament resolution regarding neo-pagan community which was strongly based on the ministry’s conclusion. These two documents are the main ones for granting recognition. However, the final verdict is done by members of the Parliament.

⁵¹ “Lietuvos gyventojai pagal tikybą 2001 ir 2011 m. surašymų duomenis”, *Religija.lt*, September 18, 2013, Accessed September 11
<https://religija.lt/straipsniai/tyrimai-analize-nuomones/lietuvos-gyventojai-pagal-tikyba-2001-2011-m-surasy-mu-duomenis>

After this being done, we start looking into the public debate – publications that appeared on several different news outlets as well as official records of the Parliament sessions and divide my analysis in the horizontal time blocks. All sources are going to be grouped in the following way: 1) Before the main session in the Parliament; 2) During the main session in the Parliament; 3) After the main session in the Parliament. This way I would be easier to track the timeline of arguments, see how it evolved and what conclusions were drawn.

3.1 How laws enter into force in Lithuania

The Ministry of Justice conclusion and members of Parliament resolutions were important factors for recognition consideration to take place. However, before explaining these documents, it is important to inform a reader about how laws (decisions) enter into force in Lithuania.

Constitutions' of the Republic of Lithuania Article 68 claims that the right of legislative initiative belongs to the Seimas, the Government, The President and a group of citizens who are able to collect 50 thousand support signatures. Then law, resolution, The Seimas resolution or the statement is being considered. There are four main stages of consideration – submission, consideration by the lead committee, consideration by the Seimas and adoption.

During the submission state authors of the draft law present the initiative at the plenary sitting of the Seimas. When the draft is approved, the Seimas sets a preliminary date for consideration of the draft at the planetary sitting of the Seimas. Also lead committee and if needed additional committees are appointed for the draft. When consideration by the committees take place where proposals are presented and hearings are held, the main consideration in the plenary sitting of the Seimas starts. There lead's committee conclusions are presented and discussions are held. Members of the parliament also are able to propose their ideas on the draft, consideration ends after voting.

The final phase is adoption – during this phase members of the parliament vote one more time. A law is adopte with at least 71 members present and by more than half of votes in favour. Afterwards the adopted law has to be signed by the Speaker of the Seimas and referred to the President to sign it. The signed law enters into force the next

day after its publication in the Register of Legal acts. If the President vetoes the law, Seimas will have to consider it repeatedly.⁵²



Lithuanian Parliament. 15min.lt picture.

⁵² Balys Valatkevičius, “Legislative Procedure”, Lithuanian Parliament, March 19, 2020.

3.2 Ministry of Justice conclusion

The Ministry of Justice presented its conclusion in 2017. In May the ministry expressed several arguments why “Romuva” is eligible for recognition and also presented a wider religious context, the history of the neo-pagan group. Ministry’s official in the letter explains that in order to be granted a recognition, the community must prove its support in the society.

According to the Constitutional court, this can be done in two ways – by providing numbers of community members or the date of registration. However, “support in the society must be strong and sustainable, therefore it cannot be limited to a group of people or part of society, several decades of activities, one or several generations of people. <...> Religious communities support must be self-evident, without any doubt⁵³”. Official also stated that recognition is granted only to a certain religious group and not to a confession. In this case there are several more “Romuva’s” registered that has different religious line and doesn’t belong to “Romuva” applying for recognition.

The Ministry of Justices in its conclusion states that neo-pagan community “Romuva” is not a new phenomenon in the Western world – similar approaches to nature, to special rites during equinoxes, in reviving pre-christian religions can be found in Germany, Greece, Italy, Sweden, Estonia, Finland, Latvia and other countries, as well as USA and Canada. According to pagan scholar Michael Strimbska, which groups neo-pagan movements into reconstructionists and eclectics, Lithuanian neo-pagan community “Romuva” is considered to be among the first ones, writes the official. Reconstructionists movements seek to recreate a certain tradition which is related to a certain nation or territory. Eclectic traditions tend to freely use various

⁵³ “Dėl išvados valstybės pripažintos religinės bendrijos statuso suteikimo senovės baltų religinei bendrijai “Romuva” klausimu pateikimo”, The Ministry of Justices of Lithuania, December 29, 2017.

religious symbols and in this way express their universality, inviting people of different races to join them. This feature, writes the official, is similar to the New Age religious phenomenon.

“In parts of Europe, Pagan religious traditions may have been continuously practiced from early times to our own, particularly in Eastern European countries such as Lithuania where many Pagan customs survived in popular culture despite official efforts at Christianization. However, even in such cases, it cannot be doubted that the Pagan religion was greatly disrupted by the introduction of Christianity. It is also worth emphasizing that the modern Pagan movement of Lithuania, known as “Romuva”, is a creation of the twentieth century, not of ancient times, even if the myths, rituals, and other traditions it practices and promotes do date from medieval or even more ancient times. Therefore, it is accurate to speak of the religious movement of “Romuva” as a “new” religion, a “modern” Pagan religion, even though the content of the religion is derived from very old Pagan sources⁵⁴”, – academic M. Strimbska was quoted in the conclusion.

“Romuva” its first steps started as an ethnocultural group in 1967 by Jonas Trinkūnas. The main goal of the movement was to documentate ethnic traditions and propagate the celebrations of ethnic feasts. The official notes that due to Soviet Union occupation the movement couldn’t flourish as a religious phenomenon and thus “Romuva” contained pro-christian members too. Religious aspects of the movement became visible when Lithuania became independent in 1991. Vilnius and Kaunas Baltic faith religious communities “Romuva” were registered in the Lithuanian government in 1992. In 2002 these two and the third community merged into one group – the ancient Baltic religious community “Romuva” which in 2019 applied for recognition.

⁵⁴ Michael Strimbska, “Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives”, ABC-CLIO, 2005, p. 10.

Ministry of Justices writes that “Romuva’s” source of faith is found in folk customs, songs and traditions which content as recreated from myths and available historical sources. “Romuva” doesn’t seek to draw dogmatic rules because there is a belief that this religion is a “natural ancestral religion” which lies in every heart of Lithuanian, thus there’s not need to be initiated into Baltic faith – Lithuanians has it as a gift”, – wrote J.Trinkūnas.⁵⁵ The official notes that romuvians practice moral code claiming that one shouldn’t do to others what one doesn’t want to be done unto him or her. Romuvians called it *darna* (or harmony). Therefore, the official states, “Romuva” practices doesn’t contradict Lithuanian laws and morals

The Ministry of Justices also emphasizes that romuvians support in the society compared to the population census in 2001 and 2011 increased by fourth times – from 1270 members of the community to 5118. In 2011 it was sixth by large religious group in Lithuania bypassing even traditional religious communities like Greek Catholic church, Jews, Karaites, Sunni Islam. The official also points out that in the public survey held in 2014 almost 30 percent of respondents evaluated “Romuva” positively, 53 – neutrally. Compared to public opinion of Evangelical Baptists church, of which one community was the first one to receive states’ recognition in Lithuania, has positive attitudes only from 7 percent of respondents. “This shows that “Romuva’s” public activities will likely to be accepted by majority of people. <...> By summarizing everything we draw a conclusion that Old Baltic religious community “Romuva” meets the requirement for states’ recognition noted in the Law of Religious communities”, – stated the official.

⁵⁵ Jonas Trinkūnas and others. “Baltų religija šiandien”. Senovės baltų religinė bendrija, Vilnius, 2013, p. 7.

3.3 Parliament's Resolution

After Ministry of Justice issued its conclusion, a group of Parliament members started to organize "Romuva's" recognition project. What was written in the resolution will be discussed in this subtopic.

The resolution was signed by 23 members of the parliament and presented in April of 2018. Members stated that Lithuanian Constitution recognizes traditional Churches in Lithuania, religious organizations and those that don't cross law and morals. They also quoted Religious communities law which says that non-traditional religious organizations can get state's recognition if their practices don't cross law and morals and if communities have support in society. Members of the Parliament also noted that religious groups can apply for recognition only after 25 years since official registration and presented the Ministry of Justice conclusion.

"Project goal is to support religious community's spiritual, cultural and societal heritage, to grant wider abilities to this community for continuing on nurturing lithuanian traditions, participating in public dialogue, encouraging the people of Lithuania to know their roots, nurturing old cultural heritage, spreading the identity, mythology and folklore of Lithuanian nation to the world communities⁵⁶", – wrote the providers of the resolution.

Nonetheless members of the parliament also states that "Romuva's" activities are important in enriching the cultural life of Lithuanians, in bringing them meaningful leisure time. Members link "Romuva" strongly with Lithuanian identity thus are willing that state's recognition will help youngsters to understand better that they live in the environment rich of spiritual meanings and connections with nature.

⁵⁶ "Aiškinamasis raštas dėl Seimo nutarimo „Dėl valstybės pripažinimo suteikimo Senovės baltų religinei bendrijai „Romuva“ projekto“, Lithuanian Parliament, April 25, 2018.

In the explanatory note of the Resolution it is written that the project is submitted by Valerijus Simulikas, the head of Human Rights committee in the Parliament, and Inija Trinkūnienė, the head of “Romuva”.

3.4 Public debate: doubts about the past and links with politics

After discussing legal procedures in the parliament let's dive into debates that took place before "Romuva's" state's recognition question was considered. The very first relevant article related to this topic appeared online in April of 2018. "University journalist" – the newspaper of Vilnius university – published a piece with "Romuva's" head Inija Trunkūnienė. A text which was republished by 15min. It can be considered as a public relation article aiming to press the Parliament to fasten the process regarding "Romuva's" recognition by the state. "Last year we celebrated 25 years since the official registration of the community and submitted an application to receive state's recognition. Up to this day we are hoping to be recognized⁵⁷", – in the beginning of the article said I. Trunkūnienė.

The piece covers "Romuva's" history, difficulties it had to go through to keep the community together. "Our beginning was in the underground, because the most active members, among whom was an ex-head Jonas Trinkūnas were persecuted by the KGB". A journalist Kristina Kanevičiūtė also wrote that the Old Baltic religious tradition is close to every Lithuanian and that neo-pagans can live well with other religious groups, whereas it is rather difficult to do for Christians. "We don't question, don't say to a Catholic, that your God is wrong. However, Catholics state that their God is the only one right" – told I. Trunkūnienė. A journalist also tried to create an emotional bond to neo-pagan community by describing various sacred rituals for weddings and baptism. She outlines how rituals are planned, what meanings different actions have. "Baltic rituals are very rich and developed", – states K. Kanevičiūtė. In the end of the article the journalist goes back to the state's recognition question and gives a reader a rather concluding quote by I. Trunkūnienė: "In Lithuania we have quite a difficult differentiating system of religious groups. I may call it discriminatory as communities

⁵⁷ Kristina Kanevičiūtė, "Krivė Inija Trunkūnienė: mes esame verti būti pripažinti", 15min, April 5, 2018.

are divided into three stages: on the highest stage we have traditional communities, on the second – those who have state's recognition but are not traditional and we belong to the lowest category – state's unrecognized community. We believe that we deserve to be recognized and therefore submitted our request", – said the head of "Romuva".



"Romuva" ritual. 15min.lt picture.

Soon after this publication no further debate in the public took place. However it seems that Lithuanian parliament, the Seimas, heard I. Trinkūnienės words and a month after, in May of 2018, submitted a resolution to grant recognition. Most of the Parliament members were for it. This move ignited some discussions as the prime of the leading Farmers party in Lithuania Ramūnas Karbauskis is known for his sympathies to neo-pagan movements. The opposition of the Parliament – a conservative party –

named this project as “Russian Lithuanian” with an idea that “Romuva” is influenced by Moscow in a negative way.

After a vote of the resolution Farmers party member Virginija Vingrienė expressed her joy that now “people will have a freedom to choose how to express themselves⁵⁸”. A member of the Liberal party Simontas Gentvile seconded V.Vingrienė by stating that “a right to a belief is one of the main human rights. <...> People want rights that are provided in our laws”. While a member of Homeland union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats (a conservative party) Arvydas Anušauskas claimed that non-traditional religious communities can already propagate a right to belief and that official status is not important. Also he states that “it is a Russian Lithuanian pagan project”. Another member of a conservative party outlined that “this religion doesn’t have any written sources left and its re-birth seems to be superficial. “Maybe it was constructed somewhere in the East?” – Dainius Kreivys asked. Ex-Prime Minister, a conservative Andrius Kubilius asked the Government's conclusion how the validation of this religion can be aligned with christian history of Lithuania, he also stressed out that Pope Francis visit is planned in the country soon, therefore urged not to make big mistakes.

A conservative party also had another rebuke towards the submission. A member of the Parliament Rimantas Jonas Dagys said that “if we talk about validation of the religion, its doctrines have to be formulated. In the Baltic priority was towards having a lot of gods with Perkūnas, the senior.” To his critique one of the authors of the submission, a member of the Parliament Valerijus Simulik said that the project aims to recognize one religious community, not religion. He also emphasized that The Ministry of Justices is for the project: “This is the community that has its creeds, traditions and that matches The Republic of Lithuania laws.” Another member of a conservative party

⁵⁸ Paulius Gritėnas, “Seimas ėmėsi idėjos suteikti valstybinį pripažinimą R.Karbauskio puoselejama senovės baltų religijai, opozicija tai vadina naisizacija”, 15min, May 24, 2018.

Andrius Navickas, which was an editor of pro-christian online newspaper Bernardinai.lt (a name derived from the Ordine of Bernardines) offered his counter arguments for the project as well. He claimed that we shouldn't pretend that neo-pagan community is a continuity of the worldview of pre-christian times. A parliament also added that this resolution is closely and personally related to the Farmers party leader R. Karbauskis.

Since the persona of R. Karbauskis is mentioned, a broader context here is necessary. Farmers party leader is one of the richest people in Lithuania which accumulated its wealth in farming and its related business. R. Karbauskis was born in Naisiai, a village close to fourth by large city Šiauliai. Naisiai now is considered as one of the most beautiful villages in Lithuania but not without R. Karbauskis and its family investments. Critics say that the whole settlement is strictly under the influence of R. Karbauskis family and village's life is sometimes regulated by this person's ideas. For example, when R. Karbauskis organizes the annual fiesta "The festival of Naisiai", alcohol selling is prohibited in village's shops. R. Karbauskis in Naisiai also has created one of the biggest parks of pagan gods in Lithuania. To add, R. Karbauskis' business works in Russia and pro-Russia countries which for a conservative party is a sign of collaboration with Moscow.

Several days after the discussion took place in the Parliament regarding "Romuva", influential journalist and columnist Rimvydas Valatka elaborated more on R. Karbauskis relations with neo-pagan religion. "[R. Karbauskis] claims that he doesn't have any interest [in recognizing "Romuva"]", because he himself has never been and will never be part of any communities, even Naisiai. <...> "I participate in activities with baltic and traditional clothes. I would like to wish everyone who calls themselves patriots to do the same even sometimes, but they are ashamed of those clothes."⁵⁹ – R.

⁵⁹ Rimvydas Valatka, "Rimvydas Valatka. Tautinis beprotnamis – su baltų religija ir VSD pažymų liturgija", Delfi, May 27, 2018.

Karbauskis was quoted by R. Valatka with sarcasm. Columnist also presented arguments against “Romuva’s” recognition. R. Valatka referred to a historian Eligijus Raila. Historian wrote that Judaism has The Old Testament, Christianity – The New Testament, Zoroastrianism – Avesta, Buddhism – The Tibetan Book of the Dead, Islam – Koran, Hinduism – Veda. “What book of the beginning has the Old Baltic religious community? Felled tree grooves? Autumn cobweb weft? Or Greta Kildišienė (former member in the Parliament of Farmers party, closely related to R.Karbauskis) memories?” – R.Valatka quoted E.Raila words. Besides these fragments of the article, columnist used ironic and satirical elements to mix “Romuva’s” question of recognition with influential personality of R. Karbauskis.

From these articles more publications started to appear. Delfi.lt journalist Mindaugas Jackevičius named his text as follows: “The topic Kubilius suggested not to make fun of: who and why are afraid of neo-pagans”. Here a journalist interviewed Vytautas Magnus university sociologist Milda Ališkauskienė. Religious scholar stated that Lithuanian society witnesses religious groups' competitive struggle and that Catholics and Evangelical Lutherans are intensively trying to deregionalize “Romuva”. M. Ališkauskienė also commented on A. Kubilius statement regarding Government’s conclusion: “I haven’t crossed any provision stating that countries have to encounter religious group regarding another group’s “eligibility” for one or another status in the country. Such suggestions by politicians raises questions about state’s and religion’s relationships, religious discrimination for religious minorities.”⁶⁰ Scholar also argued that historical facts are important but not the crucial an attempt to understand reality is made. To her, it seems that “Romuva’s” origins of traditions, creeds, rituals are questioned from the perspective of Christianity.

⁶⁰ Mindaugas Jackevičius, “Tema, kuria Kubilius siūlė nejuokauti: kas ir kodėl išsigando neopagonių”, Delfi, June 16, 2020.

“We can say that when other religious communities are being assessed through christian ethnocentricity. In these discussions I notice a force trying to deregionalize The Old Baltic religious community “Romuva” and show only its cultural background. In this way religion is opposed to culture while, from the sociology point of view, religion is a part of culture⁶¹”, – said M. Ališauskienė. Sociologist commented on “Romuva’s” connection with KGB as well. To her, this argument is invalid as similar neo-pagan movements started to appear during the same time in countries free from Russia oppression. Also, she added, the founder of “Romuva” J. Trinkūnas was prosecuted by KGB.

Pro-christian online newspaper Bernardinai.lt joined the debate soon after this publication. Ex-editor Rosita Garškaitė interviewed pro-christian Vilnius university professor Vytautas Ališauskas which is also presented as culture historian focusing on Baltic mythology. V. Ališauskas questioned The Ministry of Justice's conclusion regarding “Romuva”, he found a lot of confusion there. Besides that, professor expressed his worry that “Romuva’s” propagated ethnicity and religion mixture can negatively affect society.⁶² V. Ališauskas stated that the date of official “Romuva’s” registration is unclear as The Old Baltic religious community’s was registered in 2002, therefore 25 years necessary for recognition haven’t passed. He also noted that The Ministry of Justice representative wrote down another date – 1992 when two “Romuva” were established in Kaunas and Vilnius of which neo-pagan religious group “Romuva” was formed. Professor doubted that this play of dates is adequate. Secondly, V. Ališauskas questioned “Romuva’s” support in the society. By taking growing numbers of this community, he doubted that all of those who attributed themselves to “Baltic faith” had in mind this certain group. “People declare themselves to be catholics if they

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶² Rosita Garškaitė. “Ar valstybė turėtų pripažinti neopagonių bendriją?”, Bernardinai, June 23, 2018.

are baptized and take catholicism as part of their identity. In this case we don't know, if assigned as "Baltic faith" really identifies themselves to "Romuva", as there are more [Baltic faith groups] in Lithuania", – he stated. Article in Bernardinai. It continued on by questioning "Romuva's" roots. V. Ališauskas says that the name of The Old Baltic religious community is misleading – the notion of "Baltic", he claims, was found in XIX century by Lithuanian language scholar George Nesselmann to easily classify languages. If there were no Balts as such, he argues, how can there be Baltic faith. To add more, the professor questions primary sources of Lithuanian, Latvian and Prussian religious heritage and encourages to investigate the secondary ones attentively. Last but not least, V. Ališauskas presents a few arguments why "Romuva" recognition can be even harmful.



Perkūnas – One of the most important pagan gods. A wooden statue in Neris regional park, Lithuania. L. Tubys picture.

“By constantly emphasizing Lithuanianness, *balticness* becomes a claim to a specific national religion. As far as I know, they found themselves to be the real Lithuanianness representatives. As atheist, catholic or karaite is less Lithuanian. <...> Nonetheless, in comments on the internet that support pro-baltic tendencies, I often notice anti-western and anti-semitic provisions. Statements are constantly repeating that christianity – jews religion, constantly saying that Lithuania is occupied and until now is ruled by crusaders. <...> To my mind the development of neo-pagan can be harmful to a society. Soon atheistically oriented sociologist will say that Christianity also badly influences society, but Christianity neither with doctrine or real existence supported national conflict and encouraged Lithuanian culture to be formed in village-like stereotypes”, – the issues of “Romuva’s” recognition commented Vilnius university professor, ex-Lithuanian ambassador of The Holy throne and The Sovereign order of Malta.

Since then a rather intensive discussion started to appear. The next day ex-Lithuanian ambassador in United States of America Žygimantas Pavilionis wrote a piece “Perkūnas⁶³ or Jesus”? “Perkūnas”, – answered Karbauskis”. In his text a member of the Parliament raised a question if “Romuva” are pagans, neo-pagans or pseudo-pagans. Ž. Pavilionis referred to a colleague’s of former leader of “Romuva” J. Trinkūnas Algirdas Patackas words which claims that romuvians did not have a common worldview: “intellectuals who considered themselves Vydūnas⁶⁴ followers’ [worldview] was based on materiality. They wanted to give re-birth to the old religion as an opposition to Christianity, but they forgot Vydūnais warning that a new religion shouldn't be formed – more important is to purify and experience Christianity deeper.⁶⁵” This argument in a text is later seconded by one of the Kaunas’ district pagan

⁶³ One of the most important Gods.

⁶⁴ Wilhelm Storost, mostly known as Vydūnas, was Lithuanian-Prussian teacher, poet, humanist, philosopher, Lithuanian writer and one of the leaders of the theosophical movement in East Prussia

⁶⁵ Žygimantas Pavilionis, “Perkūnas ar Jėzus”? “Perkūnas”, – atsakė Karbauskis”, Delfi, June 25, 2018.

priest Kęstutis Račkaitis' position who had publicly asked to "refrain from the hasty recognition of "Romuva", because the goal announced by "Romuva" are different from the activities... The community does have an unambiguous worldview and does not know what it believes in..."

Ž. Povilaitis also stated that "Romuva's" Baltic creeds, symbols are not authentic, rather it is an on going superficial reconstruction with a link to political actualities (referring to R. Karbauskis and romuvians relationships). The politician argued that "Romuva" beliefs are based on the interpretation of pre-christian Baltic nations' beliefs, customs, vedic traditions. Ž. Pavilionis stated that J. Trinkūnas' concept of "darna" derives from Indian dharma. "So the original Baltic worldview from the essence doesn't have anything in common with community's "creed", – wrote a member of a conservative party. "They are even unnamed as neo-pagans, rather pseudo-pagans. A. Patackas verdict is ruthless – "the result is sad – we grew up their own pseudo-pagan sect seeking to become even a state religion." Need to mention that in his text the politician added some ambiguous claims about "Romuva" which will be discussed a bit later.

A day after one more text appeared to question the authenticity of romuvians, Bernardinai.lt republished an article from a journal "Naujasis Židinys-Aidai". An author Tomas Daugirdas refers to Gintaras Beresnevičius⁶⁶ which said that already in XIV century the old religion lost its continuity, experienced fatal trauma, no longer working on a social plane but remained in the consciousness of an individual.⁶⁷ T. Daugirdas claimed that then mythological system got destroyed, uncontrolled tradition is being improvised, pagan gods are replaced by abstractions and that gods lost their cosmic features. "From paganism, in the end, only certain customs propagated in the

⁶⁶ One of the most prominent Lithuanian historians of religions specializing in Baltic mythology.

⁶⁷ Tomas Daugirdas, "Kiek seni ir tradiciniai yra "senovės baltai"?", *Naujasis Židinys-Aidai*, June 26, 2018.

household remained”, – wrote the author. Besides that he also wondered if tradition has been lost, maybe romuvians were able to make a new life to it. However, to T. Daugirdas it seems to be unauthentic. As he pointed out by referring to Vacys Bagdonavičius⁶⁸, “Romuva’s” founders received inspiration from Indian traditions: “while browsing through Vedic mythology, he [J. Trinkūnas] saw that the ancient Baltic mythology was similar to it. Seeing this, he decided to light the first Rasa bonfire in the old Kernavė in June of that year. <...> [Then] in the depths of our souls we heard the voice of the nations’ self.” The author states that “Romuva’s” close ties with India is present up to this day – J. Trinkūnas has been using Indian religious symbols in his books, Indian delegation greeted romuvians for the opening of a new Baltic gods museum in Naisiai and said to be happy that Baltic worldview, which roots lies in ancient times, is propagated. T. Daugirdas added that the museum was built on an artificially created hill and “it seems that Lithuanian neopagans not necessarily bind their spirituality to natural artefacts but rather to various innovative and to some extent sacred landscape fictions too.”

Soon after these publications appeared online, Jonas Vaiškūnas, a priest of Romuva in Molėtai, Lithuania, wrote a commentary on delfi.lt: “Jonas Vaiškūnas: An answer to Pavilionis which wares against pagans”. In the beginning of a text J. Vaiškūnas used tough phrases like “silent hatred”, “mythical trolls”, “sting and harm⁶⁹” to, likely, express his negative emotions. A priest concentrated on Ž. Pavilionis descriptions and arguments against “Romuva” being granted recognition. J. Vaiškūnas pointed out that politician likely consciously misinforms society: “According to him [Ž. Pavilionis] Seimas will soon have to make a decision whether to recognise “Romuva” as the only Baltic religious community, the only true ancient Baltic worldview

⁶⁸ A philosopher, literary critic, former honorary president of the Vydūnas society.

⁶⁹ Jonas Vaiškūnas, “Jonas Vaiškūnas. Atsakymas prieš pagonis kariaujančiam Pavilioniui”, Delfi, June 26, 2018.

representative and part of Lithuanian national identity". J. Vaiškūnas expressed being surprised that how come a member of the Parliament didn't read the proposal of the recognition. A priest claimed that "Romuva" was seeking, according to the Law of Religious communities, state's recognition. Second point by J. Vaiškūnas was that, unlikely Ž. Pavilionis claimed, "Romuva" doesn't seek to have "an opportunity to be maintained at the expense of the state" – the priest wrote that annual donations are granted to traditional religious communities only. J. Vaiškūnas made some more counterarguments: after doing a research, the priest found out that Ž. Pavilionis misused A. Patackas words.

This line – "They are even unnamed as neo-pagans, rather pseudo-pagans. A. Patackas verdict is ruthless – "the result is sad – we grew up their own pseudo-pagan sect seeking to become even a state religion" – according to J. Vaiškūnas, A. Patackas dedicated not to "Romuva" but to theologian positivism. "It likely to be a consequence of the materialistic, Santara-Šviesa-oriented humanities that prevail in our universities. The result is sad – we grew up their own pseudo-pagan sect seeking to become even a state religion. The Faculty of Catholic Theology at Vytautas Magnus University can also add a stone to its garden on this topic...⁷⁰", – a full quote of A. Patackas was given.

"If Ž. Pavilionis does not lie, but only does not read the laws allowed by the Seimas even while sitting down to write an accused article, it is not an educational gap, but an aphrodisia...", – J. Vaiškūnas critiqued the politician. These comments were not missed by Ž. Pavilionis. He sat down to write the counter augmented piece. We will discuss it shortly, but before that it is important timeline-wise to notice that in between these discussions the National security and defense committee in the Parliament presented its position regarding "Romuva" as a threat to state security. According to

⁷⁰ Ibid.

the committee, no threats have been found as well as there were no links with Russian special agencies.⁷¹

Going back to Ž. Pavilionis and J. Vaiškūnas public debate I would like to focus only on questions related to “Romuva’s” credibility for recognition as there were more subtopics involved. In his second text Ž. Pavilionis pointed out that “Romuva” is called a sect by some romuvians and that it sought state’s recognition in the unconstitutional way (explanation is not provided), also “worships” R. Karbauskis. The politician questioned what romuvians believe in and what scholarly proofs are present, underlines that sacred texts of Hinduism are adopted by local priests. To Ž. Pavilionis, romuvians have anti-christian and anti-western ideas which automatically links them to Russia. “I would also like to reiterate that the publicly expressed and aggressive contempt for the role of Christianity in Lithuania coincides with the long-standing policies of the Soviet occupiers and now the Kremlin.”⁷² In his very last sentences Ž. Pavilionis was trying to appeal to christians which are the majority of Lithuanian population by putting this question into the context of the upcoming Pope’s visit. “It would be best if “Romuva” showed its wisdom and withdrew from this dirty anti-christian game. At least out of respect for the Pope which is coming to Lithuania. It hurts me, a Catholic, when my God is being despised. So why do I have to keep quiet? And why are you silent?”

In his counter-comment J. Vaiškūnas most of the politicians’ claims called false - regarding anti-christian, anti-western ideology, unconstitutional approach to recognition. Talking about beliefs, the priest wrote down that romuvians worship “The God (Praamžius, Sotvaras...), Perkūnas, Laima, Žemyna, Gabija, Veliuona, Vėlinas and

⁷¹ Lauryna Vireliūnaitė. “Seimo komitetas nemato pavojaus „Romuvos“ veikloje ir pritaria, kad ji gautų privilegijų”, 15min, June 27, 2018.

⁷² Žygimantas Pavilionis. “Žygimantas Pavilionis. Pasitinkam popiežių? (Atsakymas pseudopagonims)”, Delfi, June 29, 2018.

the rest of gods and goddesses⁷³". J. Vaiškūnas stated that "the real theologians <...> not only discuss Baltic Gods found in historian sources, but also recreates Lithuanian's and Prussian's Gods pantheons". Moreover, the priest emphasised Ž. Pavilionis attempt to stir up different communities and added again that "Romuva's" approach to the Parliament is based on Lithuanian laws only.

With this public letter of J. Vaiškūnas intensive debate of both parties ended. However, after several days Kęstutis Račkaitis, Kaunas district Žaliakalnis priest, had his say as well since his name was mentioned in the discussion. K. Račkaitis criticised "Romuva's" attempt to be granted the recognition – to him, it seems that this being done "without putting attention towards worldview <...> When that day comes, no one will have any questions about recognition or non-recognition, because someone's recognition is not the deciding factor in spreading the worldview. More important is what thoughts are being disseminated. That is what all the attention must be paid to."⁷⁴ This K. Račkaitis critique wasn't reacted to in the most important popular news media sites. Actually, with this letter public attention to the topic drastically decreased for the rest of the year. In the end of 2018 a journalist wrote down a short text stating that "Romuva's" recognition has been postponed⁷⁵. However, the question came back in the end of June of 2019 – an article that Seimas is going to vote for the recognition project within upcoming days was published.⁷⁶

This pre-consideration debate sets the basis of the arguments used for and against "Romuva's" recognition. From opposing party we see that "Romuva's" recognition is seen as a possible threat to the society (links with KGB, anti-western and

⁷³ Jonas Vaiškūnas. "Dėl ko Pavilionis kovoja prieš pagonis", Delfi, June 30, 2018.

⁷⁴ Kęstutis Račkaitis, "Kęstutis Račkaitis. Atsakymas dvasiniam vadovui Jonui Vaiškūnui", Delfi, July 4, 2018.

⁷⁵ BNS, "Siūlymas pripažinti senovės baltų religinę bendriją nugulė Seimo stalčiuose", LRT, December 26, 2018.

⁷⁶ Milena Andrukaitytė, "Seime į priekį pajudėjo metus stalčiuje gulėjęs projektas dėl „Romuvos“ pripažinimo", Delfi, June 25, 2019.

anti-semitic provisions, the idea of “the national religion”), “Romuva” has dubious past without sacred writings, proofs of its continuity from pre-christian times, “Romuva” is a part of political R. Karbauskis project and that the recognition project dismissal will not in any way violate human rights (one can propagate a right to a belief without an official status). Those arguing for the recognition claimed that romuvians are seeking for what is rightfully (according to Lithuanian laws) theirs.

Having in mind previously discussed cases from abroad, we can draw some conclusion that some patterns repeated in Lithuania also. For example, as per TDN, community’s insiders expressed their negative views on the group’s approach to registration saying that Druidy’s identity is difficult to define, thus that shouldn’t be sought. The same happened on “Romuva’s” wish to get grant states recognition. K. Račkaitis – a pagan priest of one of Kaunas districts – criticized this pursuit due to romuvians inconsistency in their worldview. In comparison to this particular case, we can also draw a conclusion there were no journalists or columnists trying to set the tone of perception for religious groups, like it was done by the Daily Mail author Melanie Philips. In Lithuania, however, this role was taken by politicians writing and publishing their commentaries.

In the next chapter we will discuss how consideration looked like, what actors were involved in the procedure and what arguments were used for and against.

3.4 The final rejection

June 27th of 2019 was the day of consideration to grant “Romuva” states’ recognition. Just before the procedure members of the Parliament received several letters to make an impact on their decision. One letter was sent by Archbishop Gintaras Grušas via a member of a conservative party and the other was signed by the head of “Romuva” I. Trinkūnienė.

On the first approach to parliamentarians, G. Grušas stated that “the Old Baltic religious community is historically and scientifically meaningless, unreasonable and misleading”⁷⁷. Church representative also referred to the registration date which, according to him, is 2001, therefore 25 years hasn’t passed to apply for the recognition. Moreover, G. Grušas claimed that “Romuva’s” teachings are incomplete, he also argues that numbers of the population census (in 2001 – 1270, in 2011 – 5518 members) only says that these people identify themselves with any of neo-pagan religious aspect [not necessarily “Romuva”.]

These thesis were immediately reacted to by I. Trinkūnienė. Just before the consideration, “Romuva’s” head sent her response to G. Grušas arguments for members of the Seimas. To the first statement I. Trinkūnienė underlined that the recognition project is not a theologian but a legal dispute, thus she’s not willing to dive deep in it. “Recognition is being waited to not by individual statements, individuals or groups of individuals, but by our old spiritual tradition. To recognize your roots – a matter of honor and life for every state⁷⁸”, – she claimed. To the second, community's

⁷⁷ Lukrecijus Tubys, “Bažnyčia dėl “Romuvos” rašė ir Seimui, ir ministerijai: siekė neįgyti “konkurentų”, 15min, September 6, 2019

⁷⁸ Senovės baltų religinė bendrija “Romuva”, A letter to members of the Lithuanian Parliament, June 27, 2019.

representative argued that Baltic faith communities in Vilnius and Kaunas were registered in 1992 while Religious communities law – in 1995. To her, the provisions of the law may not be applied retroactively, therefore “Romuva’s” year of registration is considered to be 1992. To a statement that “Romuva’s” teaching is incomplete, I. Trinkūnienė responded that not every teaching is passed on to someone else in a written form. A lot of natural religions, she wrote, transfers it via practices, myths, songs, hymns, customs and etc. “It is not right to apply the norms of one religion to another, presenting it as a requirement.” To the final claim of G. Grušas regarding support in the society, the leader of “Romuva” made a remark that support should be proved not by using population census but polls. She refers to a survey made in 2014 which showed that “Romuva” is the only religious minority group in Lithuanian to be seen more positively than negatively.

The final consideration of “Romuva’s” recognition project started at 15:17. The first to speak was V. Simulik, one of the authors of the resolution. He pointed out that “Romuva” has the right to be granted a recognition, this right was approved by Seimas. “If we respect each other and our respect doesn’t interfere with the other person’s respect, I think that’s where it all begins⁷⁹”, – he said. R. J. Dagys, the one who republished G. Grušas email to members of the parliament, joined the discussion afterwards. He suggested not to misinform the project essence – “communities are already legalized”. The parliamentarian once again repeated already used arguments that the notion “Baltic” is a scientific construct. “Balts are neither nation, nor culture or religiously homogenic group”. A conservative party member also argued that by recognising “Romuva” [this] religion will be legalized and in that way “religious communities’ notions will be washed out and all cultural communities could be declared as religion while religion – as cultural group”. Parliamentarian Povilas Urbšys

⁷⁹ “Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo vakarinio posėdžio Nr.304 stenograma”, Lithuanian Parliament, June 27, 2019.

in his speech said that he supports romuvians for their work on preserving the identity of the nation, pre-christian heritage and if members of the Parliament wants them to continue on this mission, he suggested to vote “for”.

Ex-Bernardinai.lt editor Andrius Navickas joined the discussion too. He immediately reacted to P. Urbšys claims regarding pre-christian heritage – A. Navickas said that “Romuva” doesn’t have anything in common with it – “They claim current religious constructions here and now.” A. Navickas was speaking about an ongoing conflict between christianity and neo-pagans – to him, it has been since 1940 when soviets marched into Lithuania. “I’m not saying that Romuva is a Soviet-era project, certainly not, but that opposition has unfortunately come from Soviet times.” A member of conservative party also stated that if this religious community will be recognized, the Seimas will have to take responsibility for continuing Soviet politics. A representative of Liberal party Simonas Gentvilas replied that today is the day to recognise this community because for 25 years it has been registered as a religious group. He also was sceptical about G. Grušas approach to parliamentarians. “Contrary to the statement of the Chairman of the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference, who, after sending letters, questions the data of the Registers of Legal Entities of the Ministers of Justice, Romuva has been waiting for this right for 25 years and it seems to me that it has dawned on her. Contrary to what the chairman of the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference says in a letter distributed today, this community has 5,000 members. and more followers.” In addition to this, S. Gentvilas also reminded that several years ago Seimas gave recognition to two religious groups that had 422 or 1852 followers.

Another member of a conservative party Mykolas Majauskas emphasized that this project is not about religious freedoms but rather state’s donations to the community and the allowance to teach their theology in schools. To him, this is the main gap between recognized and non-recognized religions. M. Majauskas put emphasis on the interpretation of the Constitutional Court that religious community’s

support in a society must be strong long-term. “Neopagans can believe whatever they want, can engage in whatever they want as long as they don’t disturb other people. This project is about a government grant”, – he said. A member of the Farmers party (colleague of R. Karbauskis) Eugenijus Jovaiša started his speech by saying that the Constitution clearly defines freedom of religion and that “Romuva” complies with all necessary requirements”. He also referred to previously stated arguments behind the “Baltic” notion. Archeologist and Baltic culture researcher said that what can be applied to linguistics, not really is applicable to nations. “These statements about Balts, who had neither their own culture nor their own national identity, are simply unfounded. <..> I think for freedoms, for freedom of religion, it has to be done.”

The last one to debate was already spoken of Ž. Pavilionis. A conservative argued that it is already known how constantly KGB worked in Soviet times to strengthen pagans in Lithuania. He also referred to Aleksandr Dugin writings stating that Christianity in Lithuania has to be destroyed. “Therefore, I believe that, whether or not they are consciously or unconsciously at the moment, those who are submitting this project are simply following the instructions of the Kremlin. You follow what A. Dugin wrote about in his books in very large print.” Ž. Pavilionis added a geopolitical level to the topic as well: he asked how it could affect relations with Poland and by approving this resolution, he said, “we will be ridiculed” by all christian world. The parliamentarian concluded his speech with a link to a possible appeal to the Constitutional court if the recognition will be granted to “Romuva” as provisions are violated.

After just a bit more than 20 minutes of discussions, a vote took place. 40 voted for, 31 – against, 15 – abstained. Project was rejected. “Thank God” – someone shouted with a round of applause.

3.5 Romuvians sought to defend their rights

Just after the consideration, around 16 o'clock, a first article appeared on delfi.lt regarding denied "Romuva's" recognition project – the procedure and debate was described. A journalist also interviewed community's head I.Trinkūnienė which was rather disappointed and claimed that this way the Seimas violated human rights. She added that "Romuva" is planning to appeal to European Court of Human Rights. "All arguments put forward against were unfounded. There was great pressure from the Church⁸⁰", – she said.

Late at night, around 23 o'clock, another text appeared on neo-pagan newsite alkas.lt. Jonas Vaiškūnas, which we already know from the debate with Ž. Pavilionis, wrote an extensive coverage of the consideration. He noted that on the submission stage on 25th of June Seimas voted for the project, "however, on the eve of the vote, under pressure from the leadership of the Catholic Church, the Seimas changed its mind."⁸¹ J. Vaiškūnas also claimed that due to the pressure from the Church, Seimas took out this resolution of the agenda last year. An author added a vote chart where a reader can see how parliamentarians voted and announced that the following day a press conference will take place "Regarding religious community "Romuva" rights".

A week ago more articles started to be published. Another text appeared after a few hours. Arūnas Valinskas, an assistant to a member of the Seimas, Mykolas Majauskas who voted against, wrote an article: "Freedom of Religion, [in]equality of religions". He argued that one of the main arguments why recognition was denied was the misperception of "Romuva's" support in the society. A. Valinskas noted that before

⁸⁰ Milena Andrukaitytė, "Seime neužteko balsų neopagonims suteikti valstybės pripažinimą", Delfi, June 27, 2019.

⁸¹ Jonas Vaiškūnas. "Pasipriešinus katalikams Seimas nesuteikė valstybės pripažinimo Senovės baltų religinei bendrijai "Romuva" (video, tiesioginė transliacija)", Alkas, June 27, 2019.

“Romuva”, three communities received state’s recognition though “some met less requirements of the Constitutional Court than “Romuva”⁸²”. Two of those communities’ status was changed by the same Seimas composition. “If the recognition of “Romuva” is already in conflict with the Constitution, then there are at least a few religious communities in Lithuania that currently have unconstitutional status” – he argued. An author also noted that some believed “Romuva” to be one’s man religion (R. Karbauskis). A. Valinskas emphasized that majority’s of Seimas members personal affection towards Christianity wasn’t an obstacle when christian religious recognitions were considered, therefore in this case “the principle of non-discrimination should be defended regardless of individuality”. A. Valinskas commented on “Romuva’s” links with KGB underling that the National security and defense committee haven’t found any threats and on “the content” of “Romuva” as well. He claimed that on the Law of Religious communities there is no requirement which describes religion’s orthodoxy, continuity etc. He writes that the main necessity is negative: not to object law and morals.

On the 9th of July a text was published on 15min.lt where a sociologist Milda Ališauskienė was interviewed: “Diversity of religions is our treasure, not challenge.” The scholar commented on the recognition case and stated that the decision was politicized, the Seimas was hypocritical as no such intensive discussions were when christian religious groups applied for the recognition. “The adoption of this decision was very strongly politicized, and the decision of the Seimas itself possibly violated the legitimate expectations of this religious community”, – she said.⁸³ Several days ago M. Ališauskienė with other members of the Parliament appeared on LRT.lt website. There she also added that the Church has huge influence on members of the Parliament and

⁸² Arūnas Valinskas. “Arūnas Valinskas: Religijos laisvė, religijų (ne)lygybė”, 15min, July 4, 2019.

⁸³ Eglė Kuktoraitė, “Sociologė Milda Ališauskienė: religijų įvairovė – mūsų turtas, o ne iššūkis”, 15min, July 9, 2019.

that non-christians lose their rights as citizens. Parliamentarian Andrius Navickas claimed that if "Recognition" was granted, "it would only cause more confusion"⁸⁴ while a member of the Farmers party Robertas Šarknickas stated that this decision violated the Constitution. He was also surprised to see Church interference in the case: "This is forbidden. Imagine if the Vatican started interfering in states with different religious communities. What kind of chaos that would cause."

With passing days the importance of "Romuva's" question was decreasing in the public media, additional comments were absent. On the 16th of July a publication appeared with "Romuva's" initiative for a petition to reconsider Parliament's decision⁸⁵. I.Trinkūnienė said to a journalist that "Romuva" met all necessary requirements, as stated by the Ministry of Justice. Also she referred to European Congress of Ethnic Religions statement that "the decision of the Seimas, influenced by strong pressure from the Roman Catholic Church, means that not only is a significant violation of the Lithuanian Constitution happened, but also it is contrary to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights"⁸⁶. Romuvians also appealed Ž. Pavilionis to Seimas Ethics and Procedures Commission, as per pro-pagan *alkas.lt* publication on the 22th of July. "Romuva's" leader I. Trinkūnienė claimed that Ž. Pavilionis statements regarding romuvians links to KGB, A. Dugin, Kremlin are slanderous and inciting discrimination on religious grounds.⁸⁷

On the 2nd of September an article was published stating that "Romuva" approached the Court of Human rights – in the appeal I.Trinkūnienė wrote that this decision discriminates against romuvians. She again repeated that the religious

⁸⁴ Mindaugas Jackevičius. "Pasmerkė Seimo sprendimą nepripažinti „Romuvos“: žmonės, kurie nėra krikščionys, Lietuvoje praranda teises", LRT, July 14, 2020.

⁸⁵ Lukrecijus Tubys, "Romuva" inicijuoja peticiją dėl valstybės pripažinimo statuso suteikimo", Delfi, July 16, 2019.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ "Romuva apskundė Seimo narį Ž. Pavilionį Seimo etikos ir procedūrų komisijai", *Alkas*, July 22, 2019.

community met all requirements and stated that because of the Seimas decision “believers in our community face restrictions on their activities and feel discriminated against. For example, marriages made by members of a community in accordance with our rites are not recognized and must be repeated in civil registry offices.”⁸⁸ To I. Trinkūnienė, the Seimas verdict was rather politically biased than legal. She also underlines – Seimas decision cannot be appealed upon in Lithuania as, according to the Constitutional Court, members’ of the parliament mandate is free. In regards to that, R. Karbauskis himself position was stated also. He said that the Seimas violated freedom of belief. He repeated that the Government and Ministry of Justices stated that “Romuva” meets all necessary requirements. Also he was surprised that the recognition question was re-formulated as “if you vote for, you vote for R. Karbauskis”⁸⁹.

On the 11th of September LRT.lt wrote that Seimas Ethics and Procedures Commission obliged Ž. Pavilionis to deny incorrect information about “Romuva”. Members of the commission also stated that the politician violated the principles of respect for man, the state, justice and decency examples set forth in the Code of Conduct of State Politicians. Commission, published LRT.lt, found no evidence of “Romuva’s” links with Kremlin, thus Ž. Pavilionis statements are untrue.⁹⁰ Two weeks later pro-christian news website bernardinai.lt published an extensive interview with Ž. Pavilions. The member of a conservative party said he’s not willing to deny his words dedicated to romuvians. According to the politician, firstly, he’s not the only one thinking the same. Secondly, such evidence must be collected by the State's security department. “It is my duty and public interest to pay attention to possible threats, to try to prevent them. I said that, in my opinion, granting state recognition status to the

⁸⁸ “Romuva” kreipėsi į Žmogaus Teisių Teismą dėl Seimo sprendimo”, LRT, September 2, 2019.

⁸⁹ Benas Brunalas. “Karbauskis apie Romuvos kreipimąsi į EŽTT: mes pasikėsinoje į žmonių tikėjimo laisvę”, Delfi, September 4, 2019.

⁹⁰ Jadvyga Bieliavskā, “Etikos sargai įpareigojo Pavilionį paneigti neteisingą informaciją apie “Romuvą”, LRT, September 11, 2019.

neo-pagan community would be in line with Kremlin ideology and policy in our region. This is my view of the circumstances, not the proof of “Romuva's” cooperation⁹¹”, – Ž. Pavilionis said.

In the end of September The Society of Lithuanian theologians circulated the statement that “Romuva's” non-recognition was biased and discriminatory. A group of theologians claim that religion slowly becomes a privilege of a few. “Lithuania is returning to the understanding that the right to freedom of religion belongs only to a selected few. It is reasonably probable that the decision of the Seimas discriminating against Romuva as a religious community and its members was largely determined by biased arguments submitted by various social groups, based on alleged scientific and legal terminology.⁹²” In addition to this the theologians claim that Archbishop G. Grušas comments regarding “Romuva” were an attempt to create a religious assessment structure solely based on christian stand-point. The society also believes that the 25 years term for a religious community to approach for state's recognition is too long. On the other hand a group of parliament members believe that the term is too short as a religious group, in order to receive state's recognition, must have strong and long term support in the society. To answer this question on 16th of November they approached the Constitutional court⁹³.

In the end of 2019, an interview with theologian Massimo Introvigne was published on 15min.lt. According to the scholar, the Seimas' decision not to grant recognition to romuvians did not violate their freedoms to practice religion. However, to his mind, the principle of religious equality has probably not been fully applied. “As I understand it, the main argument was that Romuva is not a religion. But for me, given

⁹¹ Rosita Garškaitė. “Seimo narys Ž. Pavilionis: liežuvis neapsiverčia V. Putino vadinti krikščioniu”, Bernardinai, September 25, 2019.

⁹² Austėja Masiokaitė-Liubinienė, “Religijotyrininkai: “Romuvos” nepripažinimas yra neobjektyvus ir diskriminuojantis”, LRT, September 27, 2019.

⁹³ Milena Andrukaitytė, “Grupė Seimo narių kreipėsi į KT dėl religinių bendruomenių pripažinimo termino”, LRT, November 11, 2019.

how scholars understand religion, this is not a valid objection. The world is full of very recently created religions.⁹⁴” He also reminded Scientology and Mormons which were found in the XX and XIX centuries accordingly. This was the final publication in 2019 to somehow cover consideration of “Romuva’s” recognition, but definitely on the final one in total. In July of 2020 Ž. Pavilionis struggle to prove his truths regarding romuvians continued. The politician appealed to the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court (VRAC) with the conclusion of the parliamentary ethics guard. However, unsuccessfully – VRAC stated Ž. Pavilionis “disseminated inaccurate information and thus violated the Code of Conduct for Politicians, therefore there is no reason to annul the conclusions of the Ethics and Procedures Commission of the Seimas.”⁹⁵ The following day another article showed that the politician will appeal the VRAC decision. “Democracy must be defended and no precedent can be established in a free state of the European Union that would forbid even politicians to oppose Alexander Dugin's ideas⁹⁶.”

The debate of consideration and post-consideration phases had rather similar arguments set forth as it was before the voting took place in the Seimas. Archbishop G. Grušas as well as members of a conservative party consumed already mentioned arguments like “Romuva’s” recognition can be harmful to a society, there are no evidence of the continuity of pre-christian time pagans, “Romuva” support in a society is grounded not enough, Lithuania will be misunderstood by its geopolitical, christian majority partners, like Poland.

After the resolution was dismissed, pro-romuvians, romuvians and some scholars claimed that religious rights have been or might have been violated and that

⁹⁴ Lukrecijus Tubys, “Religijų mokslininkas M.Introvigne apie iššūkius Kalėdoms, krikščionybėi bei Lietuvos bažnyčiai”, *15min*, December 24, 2019.

⁹⁵ Milena Andriukaitytė, “Ž.Paviloniui nepavyko teisme panaikinti Etikos komisijos išvados dėl “Romuvos”, *15min*, July 13, 2020.

⁹⁶ “Ž.Pavilionis skųs nepalankų teismo sprendimą dėl “Romuvos”, *15min*, July 14, 2020.

the decision by the Parliament was based on legal facts but rather political biases. Need to note that “Romuva’s” head I. Trinkūnienė offered a new argument regarding violation of human rights. She claimed that the denial puts restrictions on believers as their marriages still will not be recognized by the state.

In comparison to cases from abroad, some resemblances can be found in these parts too. When Pagan Federation applied for Charity registration in Wales and England, decision makers did not see paganism as a religion because, among other reasons, it didn’t have a single structure. Quite similar argumentation was used in “Romuva” case as well seeing its worldview, teachings, customs from the perspective of the dominant religion, Catholic Church. It can also be said that some members of the Seimas dealt with “Romuva” in a fashion already seen from the FEFEM case in Finland. As Makela wrote, FORE didn’t show an interest in understanding its traditions. The same can be applied to “Romuva”: it seems that that voters against did not ask, require or even listen to explanations counter-arguing their critical statements.

4. Summary and conclusion

The aim of the thesis was twofold: how was the legal recognition of the “Romuva” argued for and against in the public media and Lithuanian Parliament? What kind of understanding of neo-paganism in particular and religion in general was constructed in these arguments? Before going deeper into findings, it is important to remind how Lithuanian law defines religion and what are requirements for the recognition. Religious communities’ and state’s relations are described in the Law of Religious communities, in the Civil Code and in the Constitution. Neither of these documents describe “religion”. In order for a religious group to receive states’ recognition it should meet these requirements: be registered for 25 years, have proven support in the society and its creeds must be not against law and moral. According to the Ministry of Justices, which coordinates religious questions in the country, “Romuva” has met them all and therefore eligible for the recognition. However, members of the Parliament denied it. How the legal procedure was argued for and against?

Pro-romuvians’ and members’ of the Parliament that voted for arguments can be assigned into several groups. The first and the main one was that the Ministry of Justices concluded “Romuva’s” compliance for the new status. So, it is romuvians right to get what local laws provide. It was also expressed that neo-pagan community is valued for preserving national identity and pre-christian heritage. Last but not least, recent researches show its support in the society and the recognition was granted to two religious groups that had a much smaller numbers of followers by the same composition of the Seimas.

Arguments against also can be attributed to groups, six in total: the first one is a possible threat from "Romuva". It was argued that neo-pagans' may have links with Russia, KGB, is a "Russia project", also questioned if religious group doesn't have any written sources left, maybe it was constructed in the East, Aleksandr Dugin's writings were presented where an idea to strengthen pagan movements is present. Members of the Parliament also expressed their concerns regarding romuvians provisions toward West and Jews, saw them as anti-western, anti-semitic, therefore as an opposition to the country's orientation. A thought that romuvians are trying to establish a national religion, that they are "the real Lithuanianness representatives" also was brought up. Important to note – the National defense and security committees' conclusion, which was presented way before the consideration phases, noted that "Romuva" doesn't pose threats was not heard and still elaborated on.

In regards to these claims, statements about romuvians past followed. Opposition, consisting of members of the Parliament, Christian Church and pro-christian scholars, questioned if "Romuva" has any sacred writings based their creeds upon, if creeds, symbols, customs are authentic as they have similarities with Indian vedic traditions. Sceptics questioned if there was scientific proof of the continuity of pre-christian pagans, claimed that the name "The Old Baltic religious community "Romuva" is based on unfounded statements. According to V. Ališauskas, the notion "Baltic" was invented by a scholar as a language category only, therefore how can there be "Baltic faith".

To add more, critics pointed out their attention toward support in the society. It was claimed that even though the number of people calling themselves believers of "Baltic faith" increased, it does not automatically mean that all of them were assigned to "Romuva". Maybe, questioned oppositioniers, people belong to other pagan groups. Moreover, members of a conservative party involved the influential figure of R. Karbauskis. They closely linked "Romuva's" recognition with the politician as he is

perceived to be practicing pagan religion, financed pagan gods open museum in his birthplace Naisiai. R. Karbauskis does business in Russia, so to some parliamentarians it strengthened “Romuva” links with Moscow as well.

Furthermore, critics expressed their concern regarding their ties with christian community. It was required to have the Government's conclusion on how the recognition of neo-pagan community can be aligned with christian history of Lithuania. Along with that the upcoming Pope Francis visit was stressed and urges not to make big mistakes (meaning to grant recognition) were made. Ž. Pavilionis also claimed that if romuvians will be granted a new status, Lithuania will be ridiculed by all christian world, he was also concerned what geopolitical effects that might cause, especially in regards to christian dominant Poland. Last but not least some parliamentarians stated non-recognition does not violate any human rights because the freedom to practice chosen religion is maintained nonetheless. Having all the arguments against in one place we can draw a conclusion that the majority of them are not legal in their origin, rather historic or political.

“Romuva” case also revealed how religious topics are being dealt with in Lithuania. What was noticed from the debate was that the Christian Church has a very strong influence in politics in the country. It not only actively stated its position why romuvians should not be granted a new status but also tried to influence politicians with a letter before the vote as well as the Ministry of Justice about what conclusion about neo-pagans had to be drawn.

On the other hand, an already constructed cultural values, christian worldview are also to be kept in mind. For example, an idea to criticise romuvians for not having sacred writings as a basis for their creeds or to have scientific proofs of the continuity derives from christian ethnocentricity. The Law of Religious communities doesn't require any of this in order to receive state's recognition. However, such an unofficial tone to evaluate other religious communities was publicly set. It seems that the Church

tried to deregionalize “Romuva” by setting the frame through which a religion should be defined. This issue was emphasized by I. Trinkūnienė and the Society of Lithuania theologians. Moreover, strong presence of christian cultural background can be also seconded by the fact that there were no such fierce debates when the two previous christian-oriented religious groups were granted recognition.

To define a religion is a difficult task even to scholars of different fields all around the world. Some believe religion has to have a strict definition while others argue that definition should be guiding rather than indicating because of the mystical nature of it. An issue happens to be more vivid when it comes to practical matters – which religious group can receive the status of religion, which shall be denied or even called parodic, which religious organisations can be registered or recognized and receive privileges from the state. The theoretical definition of religion is not the only factor that plays. Cultural and societal background makes an impact of our understanding which the decision makers sometimes cannot be aware of. And while the approval of like-minded or established religious groups can be a rather easy task, those religious communities that practice drastically different customs and have different beliefs (monotheistic or polytheistic approach) face serious challenges to be accepted. Examples from Finland, England and Wales as well as Lithuania show that.

Owen presented an example of Pagan Federation applying for Charity registration in Wales and England showed us that those in power had their own preconceptions of what paganism is and how that influenced their ability to judge the religious group. Charity Commissionaires decided that paganism is not a religion but rather "a spiritual way of life" without having a single structure. However, a question can be raised about what a single structure is, who decided that and according to what a religion must have a single structure. Owen also argues how much diversity Charity

commission can tolerate – if, they say, some diversity is acceptable as in Hinduism, Buddhism or Christianity, diversity as a basis seems to be a ground for a denial.

Owen and Taira gave another interesting case when The Druid Network (TDN) applied for Charity registration. This example covered press involvement in the debate as well. Some articles were discussed in which columnist's preconditions were noticed not allowing her to accept druidry as a religion. Owen's and Taira's case presented a registration question was perceived from within the Druidry community also. It happened to be so that some druids aroused a question if TDN can present all druids and if there are ways to correctly define this movement.

Several interesting cases were presented by Makela. When La Societed del Amor de Dios applied for religious community's registration in Finland, it received a negative answer with an argument that the board lacks information about the practice in the Finnish community – author emphasized that the board did not request any further information and what was required to mention in the application. When FEFEM (Finnish Extremely Free Erisian Movement) applied for it, Makela writes, their application was also rejected because the community's sacred writing was too parodical to be the basis of registration. In other words, those in power to make a decision did not show an interest in understanding FEFEM, rather acknowledged that the community doesn't meet their normative approaches of what religion is supposed to look like. The last case by Makela showed a rather different approach to People of the Bear community – the board members accepted their application and categorized them as "neo-pagans" while members of the community didn't find themselves to be pagans.

"Romuva" in its pursuit for the recognition in Lithuania experienced similar problems but at the same time faced new ones. In comparison to given examples from abroad, it is important to note that the procedure of recognition works differently. That is decided by the members of Parliament rather than dedicated institutions. Unlike in England or Wales, in this matter Lithuanian responsible institution – the Ministry of

Justice – drew a positive conclusion towards neo-pagan community but the final decision was rejected by the Parliament.

From Pegan Federation case in Wales and England and FEFEM case in Finland we saw that decision makers instead of taking responsibility in their given powers, based its verdict on superficial information. “Romuva” case carries some parallels. Instead of going deeper to understand the given proposition, some members of the Parliament shared their views and evaluations on the religious group and the question of recognition using false perceptions. Some parliamentarians also expressed their doubt of neo-pagan’s community religiosity. The same happened in the case from abroad when a dedicated institution deregionalized seekers for Charity registration. Other parallels can be seen in the case of TDN. The first one is insider’s resistance towards faith-related movement. When TDN attempted to receive registration, druids from other groups stated that the network cannot define Druidry for all. In a similar fashion pagan priest K. Račkaitis officially objected to the recognition, criticizing “Romuva” for not having a consistent worldview.

“Romuva” case shows that it is difficult to receive rights provided by law for non-dominant religious groups in Lithuania, even when the Government agrees. Since the decision is done in the Lithuanian parliament rather than in a dedicated institution (as in cases from abroad), a lot of details come into play. For example, what provisions does a parliamentarian have on other religions or how he or she will be affected by active pressure from the Church. “Romuva’s” quest for the recognition is not over yet. Community is waiting for an answer from the European Court of Human Rights. If the Court’s decision will not be favorable, the community is likely to apply for the recognition 10 years later since the denial, in 2029.

5. Bibliography

Sources:

15min.lt. "Ž.Pavilionis skųs nepalankų teismo sprendimą dėl "Romuvos". 15min. July 14, 2020. Accessed October 11, 2020
<https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/z-pavilionis-skus-nepalanku-teismo-sprendima-del-romuvos-56-1347134>

Alkas.lt. "Romuva apskundė Seimo narį Ž. Pavilionį Seimo etikos ir procedūrų komisijai". Alkas. July 22, 2019. Accessed October 2, 2020:
<http://alkas.lt/2019/07/22/romuva-apskunde-seimo-nari-z-pavilioni-seimo-etikos-ir-proceduru-komisijai-video/>

Andriukaitytė, Milena. "Ž.Pavilioniui nepavyko teisme panaikinti Etikos komisijos išvados dėl "Romuvos". 15min. July 13, 2020. Accessed October 11, 2020
<https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/z-pavilioniui-nepavyko-teisme-panaikinti-etikos-komisijos-ivados-del-romuvos-56-1346428>

Andrukaitytė, Milena. "Grupė Seimo narių kreipėsi į KT dėl religinių bendruomenių pripažinimo termino". BNS. LRT. November 11, 2019. Accessed September 31, 2020
<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1116487/grupe-seimo-nariu-kreipesi-i-kt-del-religiniu-bendruomeniu-pripazinimo-termino>

Andrukaitytė, Milena. "Seime į priekį pajudėjo metus stalčiuje gulėjęs projektas dėl „Romuvos“ pripažinimo". BNS. Delfi. June 25, 2019. Accessed September 31, 2020
<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/seime-i-prieki-pajudejo-metus-stalciuje-gulejes-projektas-del-romuvos-pripazinimo.d?id=81544909>

Andrukaitytė, Milena. "Seime neužteko balsų neopagonims suteikti valstybės pripažinimą". BNS. Delfi. June 27, 2019. Accessed September 31, 2020
<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/seime-neuzteko-balsu-neopagonims-suteikti-valstybes-pripazinima.d?id=81572379>

Bieliavska, Jadvyga. "Etikos sargai įpareigojo Pavilionį paneigti neteisingą informaciją apie "Romuvą". ELTA. LRT. September 11, 2019. Accessed October 11, 2020 <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1096709/etikos-sargai-ipareigojo-paviloni-paneigti-neteisinga-informacija-apie-romuva>

BNS. "Siūlymas pripažinti senovės baltų religinę bendriją nugulė Seimo stalčiuose". LRT. December 26, 2018. Accessed September 31, 2020 <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/238880/siulymas-pripazinti-senoves-baltu-religine-bendrija-nugule-seimo-stalciuose>

Brunalas, Benas. "Karbauskis apie Romuvos kreipimąsi į EŽTT: mes pasikėsiname į žmonių tikėjimo laisvę". ELTA. Delfi. September 4, 2019. Accessed October 2, 2020 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/karbauskis-apie-romuvos-kreipimasi-i-eztt-mes-pasikesinome-i-zmoniu-tikejimo-laisve.d?id=82151853>

Daugirdas, Tomas. "Kiek seni ir tradiciniai yra "senovės baltai"?", Naujasis Židinyš-Aidai. Bernardinai. June 26, 2018. Accessed September 31, 2020 <https://www.bernardinai.lt/2018-06-26-kiek-seni-ir-tradiciniai-yra-senoves-baltai/>

Garškaitė, Rosita. "Ar valstybė turėtų pripažinti neopagonių bendriją?". Bernardinai. June 23, 2020. Accessed September 20, 2020 <https://www.bernardinai.lt/2018-06-23-ar-valstybe-turetu-pripazinti-neopagoniu-bendrija/>

Garškaitė, Rosita. "Seimo narys Ž. Pavilionis: liežuvis neapsiverčia V. Putino vadinti krikščioniu". Bernardinai. September 25, 2019. Accessed October 11, 2020 <https://www.bernardinai.lt/2019-09-25-seimo-narys-z-pavilionis-liezuvis-neapsivercia-v-putino-vadinti-krikscionimi/>

Gritėnas, Paulius. "Seimas ėmėsi idėjos suteikti valstybinį pripažinimą R.Karbauskio puoselėjamai senovės baltų religijai, opozicija tai vadina naisizacija". 15min. May 24, 2018. Accessed September 20, 2020 <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/seime-teikiamas-siulymas-suteikti-valstybini-pripazinima-r-karbauskio-puoselejamai-senoves-baltu-religijai-56-976562>

Jackevičius, Mindaugas. "Pasmerkė Seimo sprendimą nepripažinti „Romuvos“: žmonės, kurie nėra krikščionys, Lietuvoje praranda teises". LRT. July 14, 2020. Accessed October 2, 2020:

<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1075203/pasmerke-seimo-sprendima-nepripazinti-romuvos-zmones-kurie-nera-krikscionys-lietuvoje-praranda-teises>

Jackevičius, Mindaugas. "Tema, kuria Kubilius siūlė nejuokauti: kas ir kodėl išsigando neopagonių". Delfi. June 16, 2020. Accessed September 20, 2020
<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/tema-kuria-kubilius-siule-nejuokauti-kas-ir-kodel-issigando-neopagoniu.d?id=78170127>

Kanevičiūtė, Kristina. "Krivė Inija Trinkūnienė: mes esam verti būti pripažinti". 15min. April 5, 2018. Accessed September 20, 2020
<https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/krive-i-trinkuniene-mes-esam-verti-buti-pripazinti-56-951876>

Kuktoraitė, Eglė. "Sociologė Milda Ališauskienė: religijų įvairovė – mūsų turtas, o ne iššūkis". 15min. July 9, 2019. Accessed October 2, 2020
<https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/sociologe-milda-alisauskiene-religiju-ivairove-musu-turtas-o-ne-issukis-56-1171162>

Lithuanian Parliament. "Aiškinamasis raštas dėl Seimo nutarimo „Dėl valstybės pripažinimo suteikimo Senovės baltų religinei bendrijai „Romuva“ projekto". April 25, 2018. Accessed September 20
<https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/177a3570488711e89197e1115e5dbece>

Lithuanian Parliament. "Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania". Accessed September 5
<https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.21892>

Lithuanian Parliament. "Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo vakarinio posėdžio Nr.304 stenograma". June 27, 2019. Accessed September 31, 2020
<https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/49107961998411e9aab6d8dd69c6da66>

LRT.lt. "Romuva" kreipėsi į Žmogaus Teisių Teismą dėl Seimo sprendimo". LRT. September 2, 2019. Accessed October 2, 2020
<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1093577/romuva-kreipesi-i-zmogaus-teisiu-teisma-del-seimo-sprendimo>

Masiokaitė-Liubinienė, Austėja. "Religijotyrininkai: "Romuvos" nepripažinimas yra neobjektyvus ir diskriminuojantis". BNS. LRT. September 27, 2019. Accessed October 2, 2020
<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1101508/religijotyrininkai-romuvos-nepripazinimas-yra-neobjektyvus-ir-diskriminuojantis>

Oxford English Dictionary. "Religion, n.". Accessed June 15, 2020.
<https://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/161944>

Pavilionis, Žygimantas. "Perkūnas ar Jėzus"? "Perkūnas", – atsakė Karbauskis". Delfi. June 25, 2018. Accessed September 31, 2020
<https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/zygimantas-pavilionis-perkunas-ar-jezus-perkunas-atsake-karbauskis.d?id=78391859>

Pavilionis, Žygimantas. "Žygimantas Pavilionis. Pasitinkam popiežių? (Atsakymas pseudopagonims)". Delfi. June 29, 2018. Accessed September 31, 2020
<https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/zygimantas-pavilionis-pasitinkam-popieziu-atsakymas-pseudopagonims.d?id=78431547>

Račkaitis, Kęstutis. "Kęstutis Račkaitis. Atsakymas dvasiniam vadovui Jonui Vaiškūnui". Delfi. July 4, 2018. Accessed September 31, 2020
<https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/kestutis-rackaitis-atsakymas-dvasiniam-vadovui-jonui-vaiskunui.d?id=78488165>

Religija.lt. "Lietuvos gyventojai pagal tikybą 2001 ir 2011 m. surašymų duomenis". September 18, 2013, Accessed September 11, 2020
<https://religija.lt/straipsniai/tyrimai-analize-nuomones/lietuvos-gyventojai-pagal-tikyba-2001-2011-m-surasymu-duomenis>

Savickienė, Daiva. "Kodėl religinės bendrijos siekia būti pripažintomis valstybės?". Panevėžio balsas. Alfa. September 23, 2018. Accessed September 9, 2020
<https://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/50321887/kodel-religines-bendruomenes-siekia-buti-pripazintomis-valstybes>

Tarptautinių žodžių žodynas. "Religija reikšmė". Accessed June 15, 2020,
<https://tzz.lt/r/religija/>

Senovės baltų religinė bendrija "Romuva". A letter to members of the Lithuanian Parliament. June 27, 2019.

The Ministry of Justice of Lithuania. "Įregistruotų religinių organizacijų skaičius 2007-2019 m." 2019.

The Ministry of Justices of Lithuania. "Dėl išvados valstybės pripažintos religinės bendrijos statuso suteikimo senovės baltų religinei bendrijai "Romuva" klausimu pateikimo". December 29, 2017.

The Ministry of Justices of Lithuania. "Lietuvos Respublikos religinių bendruomenių ir bendrijų įstatymas". 2019 Accessed September 5, 2020
https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.B4DBBD7C388A/TAIS_363706

Tubys, Lukrecijus. "Bažnyčia dėl "Romuvos" rašė ir Seimui, ir ministerijai: siekė neįgyti "konkurentų." 15min. September 6, 2019. Accessed June 14, 2020
<https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/baznycia-del-romuvos-rase-ir-seimui-ir-vyriausybei-izvelgia-griezta-ona-ir-sieki-daryti-itaka-56-1197188>

Tubys, Lukrecijus. "Religijų mokslininkas M.Introvigne apie iššūkius Kalėdoms, krikščionybei bei Lietuvos bažnyčiai". 15min. December 24, 2019. Accessed July 22, 2020
<https://www.15min.lt/max/naujiena/gyvenimas/religiju-mokslininkas-m-introvigne-api-e-issukius-kaledoms-krikscionybei-bei-lietuvos-baznyciai-1222-1245676>

Tubys, Lukrecijus. "Romuva" inicijuoja peticiją dėl valstybės pripažinimo statuso suteikimo". ELTA. Delfi. July 16, 2019. Accessed October 2, 2020
<https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/romuva-inicijuoja-peticija-del-valstybes-pripazinimo-statuso-suteikimo.d?id=81732539>

Vaiškūnas, Jonas. "Dėl ko Pavilionis kovoja prieš pagonis". Delfi. June 30, 2018. Accessed September 31, 2020
<https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/jonas-vaiskunas-del-ko-pavilionis-kovoja-pries-pagonis.d?id=78453473>

Vaiškūnas, Jonas. "Jonas Vaiškūnas. Atsakymas prieš pagonis kariaujančiam Pavilioniui". Delfi. June 26, 2018. Accessed September 31, 2020
<https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/jonas-vaiskunas-atsakymas-pries-pagonis-kariaujan-ciam-pavilioniui.d?id=78405395>

Vaiškūnas, Jonas. "Pasipriešinus katalikams Seimas nesuteikė valstybės pripažinimo Senovės baltų religinei bendrijai „Romuva“ (video, tiesioginė transliacija)". Alkas. June 27, 2019. Accessed September 31, 2020
<http://alkas.lt/2019/06/27/pasipriesinus-katalikams-seimas-nesuteike-valstybes-pripazini-mo-senoves-baltu-religinei-bendrijai-romuva-video/>

Valatka, Rimvydas. "Rimvydas Valatka. Tautinis beprotnamis – su baltų religija ir VSD pažymų liturgija". Delfi. May 27, 2018. Accessed September 20, 2020 <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/rimvydas-valatka-tautinis-beprotnamis-su-baltu-religija-ir-vsd-pazymu-liturgija.d?id=78118307>

Valatkevičius, Balys. "Legislative Procedure". Lithuanian Parliament. March 19, 2020. Accessed September 11, 2020 https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35365&p_k=2&p_t=161668

Valinskas, Arūnas. "Arūnas Valinskas: Religijos laisvė, religijų (ne)lygybė". 15min. July 4, 2019. Accessed October 2, 2020 <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/nuomones/arunas-valinskas-religijos-laisve-religiju-ne-lygybe-18-1169554>

Vireliūnaitė, Lauryna. "Seimo komitetas nemato pavojaus „Romuvos“ veikloje ir pritaria, kad ji gautų privilegijų". 15min. June 27, 2018. Accessed September 31, 2020 <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/seimo-komitetas-nemato-pavojaus-romuvos-veikloje-ir-pritaria-kad-ji-gautu-privilegiju-56-992928>

Literature:

Alisauskiene, Milda & Aleknaitė, Eglė & Pranskeviciute, Rasa & Pazeraite, Ausra & Pozerskyte, Monika. "Religijų įvairovė Lietuvoje: portretai, kasdienybė ir šventės". Vytautas Magnus university, Versus Aureus. 2014. p. 176.

Årsheim, Helge. "Implicit beliefs, explicit practices? How international Human Rights Law manages religion". *Implicit Religion*. 2018. Vol. 21 Issue 3. p. 285-300.

Balsys, Rimantas. "Paganism of the Balts. The Beggar Pilgrim: Origins and Evolution". *Interdisciplinary Cultural researches*. 2018. 6:2. p. 98-115.

Baronas, Darius "Christians in Late Pagan, and Pagans in Early Christian Lithuania: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries". *Lithuanian Historical Studies*. 2015. 19. p. 51-81.

Beaman, Lori G. "Deep equality in an era of religious diversity". Oxford University press. 2017. p. 233.

Cusack, Carole M. and David G. Robertson, with Christopher R. Cotter. 2012. "Invented Religions." The Religious Studies Project (Podcast Transcript). 30 January 2012. Transcribed by Martin Lepage. Version 1.1. 25 September, 2015. Available at: <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/podcast-carole-cusack-on-invented-religions/>

Cusack, Carole. "Invented religions imagination, fiction and faith. Invented Religions Imagination, Fiction and Faith". Ashgate Publishing Company. 2010. p. 179.

Edge, Peter W. "Religion and Law. An Introduction". Ashgate Publishing Company. 2006. p. 160.

Giles, Jessica. "Religious Freedom in Global Context". *Implicit Religion*. 2018. 21(3) p. 239–270.

Gutauskas, Mintautas. "Religija ir sekuliari viešojo interpretacija". *Religija ir kultūra*. 7(1-2), 2010. p. 45-54. Accessed August 22, 2020: <https://doi.org/10.15388/Relig.2010.1.2765>.

Horton, Robin. "A Definition of Religion, and its Uses". *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*. Vol. 90, No. 2 (Jul. - Dec., 1960). p. 201-226.

L. Berger, Peter. "The Social Reality of Religion". Penguin Books. London. 1967. p. 249.

Mäkelä, Essi Eleonoora. "'Impartial Sources' and the Registration of Religious Communities in Finland". *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*. 2018. 31 (1):3-26.

McCutcheon, Russell T. "Manufacturing religion: the discourse on sui generis religion and the politics of nostalgia". New York: Oxford University Press. 1997. Accessed August 1, 2020 <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.30846.0001.001>.

McCutcheon, Russell T. "The Discipline of Religion – Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric". Routledge. 2003. p. 352.

McCutcheon, Russell T. & Arnal William "The Sacred Is the Profane – The Political Nature of "Religion". Oxford University Press. 2012. p. 264.

Mcfaul, Hugh. "Pushing the boundaries: legal approaches to the definition of religion". *Implicit Religion*. 2018. Vol. 21 Issue 3. p. 223-238.

Melton, J. Gordon. "Perspective New New Religions: Revisiting a Concept". *Nova Religio* 10/4 (2007). p. 103-112.

Owen, Suzanne & Taira, Teemu. "The Category of 'Religion' in Public Classification: Charity Registration of the Druid Network in England and Wales." *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty*. Editor Trevor Stack & Naomi Goldenberg & Timothy Fitzgerald. Vol. 2015 Leiden: Brill. 2015. p. 90-114.

Owen, Suzanne. "The problem with paganism in Charity Registration in England and Wales". *Implicit Religion*. 2018. Vol. 21 Issue 3. p. 271-284.

Phillips, Melanie. "MELANIE PHILIPS: Druids as an official religion? Stones of Praise here we come". The Daily Mail. October 4, 2010. Accessed July 1 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1317490/Druids-official-religion-Stones-Praise-come.html>

Ragauskas, Petras. "Įstatymų Leidyba Lietuvoje : Samprata Ir Institucinis Modelis". *Teisės Instituto Mokslo Tyrimai*; 1. Vilnius: Teisės Institutas, 2005. p. 231

Saler, Benson. "Religio and the Definition of Religion." *Cultural Anthropology* 2, no. 3 (1987): 395-99. Accessed September 9, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/656433>.

Saler, Benson. "Towards a realistic and relevant "Science of Religion". *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 16, no. 3 (2004): 205-33. Accessed June 15, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23551294>.

Saler, Benson. "Understanding Religion". Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2009. p. 246.

Strimska, Michael. "Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives". ABC-CLIO. 2005, p. 382.

Sullivan, Winnifred Fallers. "The impossibility of religious freedoms". Princeton University Press. 2005. p. 286.

Taira, Teemu. "Religion as a Discursive Technique: The Politics of Classifying Wicca". *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. 2010. 25: 3. p. 379-394.

Taira, Teemu. "The category of 'invented religion': A new opportunity for studying discourses on 'religion'". *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. 2013. 14:4. p. 477-493.

Taylor, Charles. "A Secular Age". Cambridge, Mass. and London. 2007. p. 874.

Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, eds. "World Religion Database". Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020.

Trinkūnas, J. and others. "Baltų religija šiandien". Senovės baltų religinė bendrija. Vilnius. 2013. p. 44.